



ROK GAME FANTASY STORY
유성 게임 판타지 장편 소설

아크
더
레전드
ARK THE LEGEND

ARK THE LEGEND

BOOK 10

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Ark the Legend

(아크 더 레전드)

by
Yoo Seong

Synopsis

A new game which the nation has dived into.

From the bloody battlefields to the pyramids of ancient times, head into the colourful world of Galaxian.

The glorious days of the legendary gamer Ark is over.

From finding a job to saving the party from a humiliating death, nothing is easily solved.....

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Space 1: Black Hawk

SPACE 1. Black Hawk

‘.....What?’

Ark scratched his head. The trip to Rakunka had been quite arduous. As a result he managed to obtain the Baius Shield that had been left for the Elim’s Heir. His difficulties weren’t due to the Myutal but more because of the time constraints. He needed to meet up with the 2nd investigation team on time. Thanks to that, Ark spent his time on Rakunka jumping like his tail was on fire. But all that hard work was for nothing. Despite his efforts he ended up being 30 minutes late. However the promise had been caught a week before. He thought being half an hour late wasn’t that bad but Marquis Martin’s response was cold.

“You’re late.”

“Ah, I’m really sorry. That.....”

“I’ll listen to your excuses later. Follow me.”

Marquis Martin interrupted Ark’s words and turned his body. He walked down the hall silently with a frown.

‘What’s with that attitude? Damn, does he think I was being idle? I might’ve been late but it was only 30 minutes! I went through all that trouble so that I wouldn’t be late! Is he going to remove me from the team because I’m 30 minutes late? Isn’t he a noble?’

Thanks to that Ark’s mood was unpleasant.

‘Dammit, should I really join the investigation team?’

In fact, his mood wasn't just due to Marquis Martin's attitude. Ark had felt a mixture of disappointment and expectation after finding the Baius Shield on Rakunka. The reason he was disappointed was because the performance didn't match up to his expectations of a Divine Artefact. But the Baius shield had an advantage that could compensate for such shortcomings. It was a growth type equipment. This was the part Ark was worried about.

'A growth type item becomes stronger the more it is used. In other words, it isn't beneficial straight away. But if I join the investigation team then it would be more difficult to find another Divine Artefact. Of course, the Divine Artefact is just for my occupation so it can be delayed. However there is no guarantee that the mission will be a success if I join the investigation team. I might just be throwing away my time. Then wouldn't it be better to concentrate on finding the Divine Artefact?'

He was impatient to start looking now that he had found one. But Ark soon shook his head. <Dark Omen> was a main quest that had begun with Episode II of Galaxian! The compensation would be incomparable to general quests. Of course, all agents had been given the <Dark Omen> quest so it could be completed without joining the investigation team. However the person who had access to a wide information network and support was more likely to succeed. Ark had also received the <Investigate the Negative energy> quest from the Elim's Memory.

'If I join the investigation team then I can get the support of the galactic federation. It will be a huge advantage to join the team. I can find the Divine Artefacts at any time but this opportunity won't come again. I can't give up this chance. I should worry about one thing first.'

It was his relationship with Marquis Martin. The relationship with NPCs was one of the most important things in RPG games. Players often misunderstood

this but NPCs were the ‘top’ in a game world, not users. NPCs gave out quests and items as well as managed the game system. It didn’t matter if they stayed day and night in a hunting ground raising their levels. A NPC’s help was indispensable. Especially if the person was a high ranking noble of the federation. Such a relationship wasn’t created by itself.

He had completed the difficult quests Marquis Martin gave up and their intimacy gradually increased. In other words, this was the result of his time and efforts. And it was easy for that intimacy to drop. If he cancelled a quest that he accepted that the good feelings would decrease and intimacy would drop. He couldn’t be too impatient to find the Divine Artefact! Therefore he felt upset because of such blatant disregard. But he couldn’t do anything stupid.

‘Yes. He had me by the throat. What power do I have? I need to endure it.’

Ark stared at Marquis Martin’s back. Then Marquis Martin suddenly stopped moving. He sighed and spoke in a low voice.

“The situation has become a little troublesome.”

“Huh?”

Ark was confused by the sudden words. Then Marquis Martin slowly turned his body and looked at Ark.

“Do you know the purpose of this mission?”

“Well, that....”

“It is to investigate the magic circle that caused change in the galaxy. That was the external reason.”

“Then the real purpose was something separate?”

“No, that is the purpose. At the same time, 3 magic circles the size of intermediate planets were created before disappearing. Someone deliberately

did it. Furthermore, a sizeable organization must be behind it considering the scale of the event. Those guys made the magic circle for some reason so the federation considers them a serious threat. But it is the negative energy detected with the magic circle that is the real threat.”

“You mean the antimatter that you mentioned in the orbital headquarters?”

“Yes, it is something that shouldn’t even exist in this star system.”

“But the negative energy was detected which means it must exist?”

“That is the problem.”

Marquis Martin sighed and continued talking.

“Like the name suggests, antimatter is antimatter. It has the opposite structure of common substances. If common substances have the plus (+) property, antimatter has the negative (-) properties. So antimatter destroys any substances that it comes in contact with. The problem is the tremendous energy that will occur as a result of the process. The amount of energy is thousands of times stronger than a hydrogen bomb. No, that is just what the witness presumed.”

“Witness? Someone saw it directly?”

“At one time the 3 powers fought a war against each other. And stronger weapons would have a greater impact on the outcome of the war. It was natural that the 3 powers would be interested in antimatter. And on the surface we don’t know the end of the Galaxy War. A secret research centre ran by the Aschulat managed to succeed in creating antimatter.”

“Didn’t you just say there was no antimatter in the galaxy?”

“There is none now.”

“Didn’t they manage to make it?”

“It was created. But it failed to stabilize. The result is called the tragedy of Rajenka. The generated antimatter immediately started overflowing and the energy caused the planet of Rajenka to disappear without a trace.”

It was a fear that all species had never experienced before! The event was enough to make all 3 powers in the galaxy tremble with fear.

“That’s the reason why the 3 powers signed a truce. At that time the weapons development had already reached its limit. The only thing that exists beyond that limit was antimatter. But they realized something through the tragedy of Rajenka. The weaponization of antimatter wasn’t a victory. Thus the 3 powers signed a truce to ban the research of antimatter. And the scattered satellites all over the galaxy in order to monitor for negative energy.”

That’s the reason why the 3 powers were so sensitive about this matter. They still needed to confirm that threat directly but there was no doubt about it. The problem was that the negative energy was detected in the airspace called the space frontier.

“This is why the 3 powers can’t move aggressively.”

“Because of the special treaty.”

“If the identity of the energy is really antimatter then the enemy will be beyond different powers. In that situation no one would think about upholding the special treaty. But nothing is definite yet. If troops enter the space frontier in this situation then it will only irritate the enemy. The result is.....”

War! It would be the beginning of the second space war. The 3 powers had commissioned agents in order to avoid that situation. But that was just for show. The problem was connected to the life or death of the 3 powers. They couldn’t just leave it in the hands of private agents. Just like the federation dispatched secret agents like Irina, the Rama and Aschulat had also sent special

forces. This means the spies of the 3 powers were all gathering at the same place with the same purpose. It was natural for there to be disputes in order to get information about the antimatter first.

“But sending more troops as reinforcements is difficult. Just like we know, the Rama and Aschulat also know that we’ve sent secret units. If we increase the troops then they will also increase their troops. Then it will only be a matter of time before it becomes a battlefield.”

That’s one of the reasons why they created the 2nd investigation team. The mobilization of any more troops would be dangerous. That’s what the private agents were for. The federation decided to organize agents to investigate. Marquis Martin then expressed his displeasure and muttered.

“It was a mistake.”

“A mistake?”

“Who do you think would be the worst person to get their hands on the antimatter?”

“The Rama.”

“Wrong. The correct answer is Marquis Jyubel.”

“Eh? Marquis Jyubel?”

“Antimatter is a very dangerous existence. The 3 powers knew how dangerous antimatter was after the tragedy of Rajenka. It isn’t something that can be abused as a weapon. The 3 powers are dispatching secret troops in order to stop the other 2 from obtaining the antimatter, rather than using it to become stronger. However Jyubel’s position is different. If the military gains the antimatter then their influence will strengthen.”

“And his power will weaken.”

Marquis Jyubel was the Minister of Domestic Affairs and head of the opposite faction. If the military got their hands on the antimatter then Jyubel's political base would be weakened.

"Until now Jyubel had no justification to stick his neck into this thing. The antimatter is a weapon and everything related to it belongs to the military. But the situation changed with the 2nd investigation team. Because the management of private agents is under the jurisdiction of Domestic Affairs."

Marquis Jyubel didn't miss this small chance. He persistently used that excuse to request control of the 2nd investigation team. Of course, Marquis Martin wasn't going to yield obediently to him. It was the opposition of the two factions! Ark had no way of knowing that the nerves of both factions were extremely sensitive. It was to the extent that there was an internal discord in the parliament.

"But didn't you catch Marquis Jyubel's weak point?"

"The incident with S-20?"

Marquis Martin laughed and shook his head.

"That would intimidate but it wouldn't hurt the enemy. It depends on what they want to achieve. In other words, the enemy would only accept a small range. Jyubel is in a dire situation so he won't care about that weak point during the negotiations."

"Then the 2n task force....."

"In the end, his Majesty himself had to arbitrate."

The Emperor was forced to intervene in the fight between the two factions. The galactic federation is a republic so the Emperor is just a symbolic presence. However the Emperor was still the Emperor. He was an existence that ruled

over all the aristocrats in the federation. It was like the Emperor was giving a verdict on whether chicken should be fried or with sauce. No, he decided to divide the pioneers of the investigation team into the two factions.

“In other words, half of the task force organized are pioneers under Marquis Jyubel’s influence. Do you know what that means?”

Of course. Ark smiled and replied.

“Yes, this means the reward for the mission has increased.”

“What?”

“There is currently a battle between the noble factions over their influence in the mission but it has nothing to do with the investigation team members. If the mission is successful then all pioneers in the team would receive compensation. But the information about the antimatter is more important to the nobles than the success or failure of the mission. If you want the pioneers you recommended to work harder than you need to prepare a bonus steak.”

“....That is the correct answer.”

Marquis Martin answered with an odd expression. If Ark found information on the antimatter then it would be the quest reward + α .

‘Okay. I’m getting more motivated.’

In fact, Ark also wanted to stop Marquis Jyubel’s power from growing. Jyubel had teamed up with the Laius company in order to steal S-20 from Ark. Ark had formed a hostile relationship with Jyubel thanks to that event. If Marquis Jyubel obtained more power than Ark would be negatively affected.

“You seem to have understood.”

Marquis Martin then turned his body around again. He paused in front of the door of the room where the pioneers were gathered and said in a low voice.

“Don’t forget. From now on you’re not just dealing with the task force from the Rama and Aschulat. Some pioneers are also recommended by an enemy faction! The enemy will be close so you have to stay vigilant. You can’t relax.”

‘.....That’s what he said.....’

He frowned at the man in front of him.

‘I didn’t think it would be like this.’

The blonde youth Ark was staring at was Rapid! Of course Ark recognized Rapid. He was the user who helped S-20 grow while Ark was away. They only had a short 10 minute conversation but it was impossible to forget about it.

“Do you know him?”

“No. I don’t know that person at all.”

But his answer to Marquis Martin wasn’t completely a lie. Obviously they had met. However he had died in a duel with Kurakan immediately after so Ark didn’t know who Rapid was. There was one thing Ark couldn’t understand. Rapid hadn’t left S-20 for 10 days in order to meet Ark. But 20 days had passed since Kurakan killed him and he hadn’t returned to S-20. Therefore the reason why Rapid was waiting for Ark was still a mystery.

‘This was the answer?’

Ark’s gaze turned towards Marquis Jyubel. Each faction had recommended 10 agents each. There was a limited personnel so naturally they had to be cautious. Considering the nature of the mission, he had to choose skilled and reliable pioneers. In other words, the pioneers gathered in the room had a close relationship with the aristocrats. Ark’s relationship was with Marquis Martin. Then Rapid had an association with Marquis Jyubel.

‘The relationship can’t just be for a few days if he was recommended for this task force. That means they already had a relationship when Rapid was in S-20. Rapid disappeared and then Jyubel gave me 10 days to save S-20.....this can’t be a coincidence.’

If he thought about it then the answer would come naturally.

‘The reason he was in S-20 wasn’t to wait for me. It was to collect information for Jyubel and the Laius company. It is also the reason why he was defeated by Kurakan despite his skills in marksmanship. He just used waiting for me as an excuse. If people started to question it then it would become difficult. He used that duel as a pretext to leave S-20. That’s how the Laius company knew about the situation in S-20. Dammit, I didn’t know until now.....’

Ark originally had a good impression of Rapid. He was the user who helped S-20 grow while Ark was away. His development of S-20 was almost the same as Ark’s blueprints. He also displayed extraordinary marksmanship in the duel. It meant he was smart and skilled! Therefore Ark had been thinking about scouting Rapid. Yet Rapid’s true identity was Jyubel’s mole. He felt betrayed! And angry!

‘So you tricked me huh? Okay, good. You asked me when we met if I was the Ark from New World? You sounded really curious so I’ll let you know soon. Don’t you know who I am? I’ll make you regret having Ark as an enemy. I’ll make you shed tears of blood and regret for this!’

Ark thought furiously.

“Nice to meet you. Please call me Rapid.”

Rapid shamelessly stretched out his hand. Of course Ark didn’t want to shake his hand.

“I’m sorry but I have no intention of becoming friendly with you.”

Rapid didn't show a reaction to his response. He just shrugged and took back his hand. Jyubel laughed and looked at Marquis Martin.

"Marquis-nim should teach your dog some manners."

"I'm not raising a dog. And even if I was, I'm not going to teach him to shake hands with someone who might tear out his neck later."

"Someone who might tear out his neck.....is that so?"

"I hope something like that doesn't happen."

"I can't promise anything."

An answer was heard from behind Marquis Jyubel. A man was coming up to the place where Ark, Rapid, Marquis Martin and Marquis Jyubel were gathered. Ark reflexively turned his head and became confused.

"Y-you....."

The man who had a square jaw was smiling meaningfully! Surprisingly that person was.....

".....Who are you?"

Ark tilted his head to one side and asked.

The man frowned and answered in a low voice.

"Valencia."

"Ah, yes. Valencia! I had forgotten about you. Please tell me your name the next time you appear. Huhuhu, the dog who was smashed by me has appeared. Then I guess you want that to happen again."

Ark made a really hateful expression and laughed. Then Rapid turned his head to look at Valencia. His eyes seemed to be asking if it was true. Valencia's face reddened with shame.

“You cocky bastard. Don’t mess with me.”

“Ha, the dog that was smashed by me is yelling while the other wants to welcome me kindly. I wonder who the cocky ones are?”

“If you keep having that thought then you’ll disappear.”

“Why don’t you try saying that after fighting me?”

Ark replied in a ludicrous voice. But unlike his unconcerned expression, inwardly he was confused. Ark’s head was already confused by the appearance of Rapid. And now there was the addition of Valencia.

–Valencia was the leader of the 1st armoured platoon on Beltana.

I unknowingly aggravated someone with a high rank. But I paid him back with interest.

I don’t need to worry about that guy now.

This was the three line history of Valencia that Ark remembered. But two lines were added after their reunion at Mt. Fargo.

I smashed him once again.

I don’t need to worry about that guy anymore.

It might’ve increased to 5 lines but the bottom line was that he didn’t need to worry about that guy. It was impossible to be comfortable now that he saw Valencia again. Valencia’s aura clearly showed that he wanted revenge. That wasn’t the only worrisome part.

‘The magic circle in the Harmadon constellation was the work of the robed men who attacked Mt. Fargo. And Valencia was with that man. He might’ve simply been hired as a mercenary but.....’

He couldn’t ignore the possibility that Valencia had a relationship with those

guys. That guy possessed a grudge against Ark and he might have something to do with this event! A guy like that was part of the investigation team. Rapid was also Marquis Jyubel's mole. Ark already had a headache before it even started.

'Damn, of all users why is it Valencia.....?'

Ark sighed with frustration. Marquis Martin frowned and asked Jyubel.

"What happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"Valencia is a person dishonourable discharged from the federation."

"That isn't a problem. Any private agent is qualified for the investigation team. And like Marquis-nim said, Valencia isn't part of the federal army anymore. Apart from the grudge he has against Ark, is there any reason that I shouldn't recommend him?"

'Jyubel.'

Ark immediately understood the situation. It was no coincidence that Valencia was on the team. Ark planted the impression of 'tough opponent' in Marquis Jyubel after the events in S-20. Therefore he was quite neurotic after learning Ark would participate in the investigation team. So Jyubel needed participants who would mark Ark. The user he selected for this role was Valencia! In other words, Valencia was there as an anti-Ark.

"It seems like I don't have to introduce the two of you. I don't have anything else to say so please excuse me. I'll expect a lot from you in this investigation."

Jyubel said meaningfully and turned around. He walked towards the pioneers gathered on one side with Rapid and Valencia beside him. Marquis Martin watched their backs before clicking his tongue and saying.

"How troublesome."

“Well, it doesn’t change anything.”

Ark muttered.

“Didn’t you say the pioneers were split into factions? This is an opportunity to learn those who are hostile towards me. It will also give me more motivation to fight against those guys.”

“You have confidence in yourself.”

“I need to be confident since you’ve handpicked me.”

“That’s right.”

Marquis Martin nodded with satisfaction. Of course, Ark had to beware of opponents other than Rapid and Valencia. Ark was with the military faction and the factions were competing. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that all the pioneers gathered around Marquis Jyubel were from the enemy faction. However Ark also wasn’t alone. Valencia and Rapid belonged to the political faction while Ark belonged to the military one. Of course the military faction kept a distance from Jyubel.

“I’ll introduce you.”

“There is no need.”

Marquis Martin said after they walked over to the users in the military faction. A user with a small body and moustache who looked like Super Mario said to them. His round eyes looked Ark up and down before smiling.

“Ark-nim, you are the one who received the title of Beltana and Athamas’ Hero?”

“You know me?”

“Of course. I was in this room when Marquis Martin said your name. Well, I did hear it before. You were persistently broadcasted on the federal TV. There is

no one gathered here who doesn't know about Ark-nim."

Once again, Ark was a celebrity. Furthermore he had performed psychological warfare with Marquis Jyubel as soon as he entered the room. Ark had unintentionally drawn their interest when he provoked Rapid and Valencia.

"Yes, that's why I don't need to introduce you separately."

Marquis Martin stepped back with a smile. Then Mario (?) approached Ark even more closely and said.

"Is there anybody who doesn't know Ark-nim? All the people here must've heard Marquis-nim. We're reliable colleagues unlike those guys over there. But I'll introduce you."

Mario went to grab Ark's arm.

"Hey, you over there!"

"M-me?"

"Who else would I be pointing to? This body is the one that reached 18th place. Do you have any questions? You are the youngest so of course you should do it."

"B-but....."

"Shut up! Just do it quickly!"

3 men were whispering together when one of them was pushed. The man who was pushed out flinched and jumped with surprise. However, the two guys behind were glaring so he came up to Ark with weeping eyes.

"I-I.....I have a question....."

"Huh? What is it?"

"That is, have you ever.....I mean.....are you the Ark of New World?"

‘Hah, this question again.’

He was already sick of this situation. He needed to repeat the same answer and he also needed to watch the other side’s response. Ark could tell whether they were pleased or disappointed by their reactions. It would be difficult to be comfortable in their presence. But this time something was different.

“No. I am a different Ark.”

“R-really? Really?”

“Yes, I heard that Ark hasn’t started Galaxian yet?”

“Yes, I heard thank to! Indeed! Thank you very much!”

“Huh? Thank you?”

“Ah, no! Hyung-nims, it isn’t him!”

The man shouted brightly as he ran to his fellow colleagues. Then he hugged the user who had said ‘shut up!’

“It wasn’t him! He just resembles that guy!”

It was the first time Ark had seen this reaction. Didn’t they seem slightly pitiable?

“Who are those people?”

“Eh? You don’t know him?”

Mario asked with a surprised expression.

“Doesn’t Ark-nim watch the game exclusive news?”

“Game exclusive news.....”

Ark flinched as he heard the words from Mario’s mouth. The game exclusive news was a program focused on virtual reality games that 80% of gamers in

Korea watched. Ark of New World had appeared on the game exclusive news before. Well, he could get game related information through the broadcast so Ark had watched it every week. However not long ago he started avoiding watching the game exclusive news. It was after the female MC was changed. The name of the new female MC was Jung Hye-sun. In the past Ark knew her as Roco. These days many people who got a divorce were friends but their relationship was still uncomfortable.

“I didn’t watch the TV.”

“The one who talked to Ark-nim was B and the other one is Ferguson. He is a famous user like Ark-nim. The game exclusive news just recently released a ranking of users from #1 to #50 and Ferguson took the 18th spot. Well he was pushed out of the rankings in the next week. The two people he’s here with is A and B.”

“A and B?”

“Yes. A and B. That’s their names.”

A and B.....Ark had heard some strange names over the several years he was playing games but these were the worst.

‘They are A and B? Is that real?’

It was to the extent that he felt compassion for them! Nevertheless, Ark was more interested in Ferguson than in A and B. Galaxian serviced the whole world and millions of players accessed it at the same time. There were millions of registered users. Of course the game exclusive news couldn’t investigate all the users but no ordinary person could reach rank 18. His naming sense also wasn’t ordinary.

‘I have to keep an eye on him.’

Perhaps Ferguson might be necessary. If they wanted to avoid Ark in Galaxian then they've probably given up on New World already. Ferguson wasn't the only user Ark was paying attention to.

'.....Over there as well?'

The other users weren't inferior to Ferguson. The pioneers gathered in the room were those specifically picked by the nobles of the federation. In other words, they were users with the certificate of quality from the federation nobles.

It was possible to understand just from looking at the equipment.

The more high level and expensive the equipment was, the more flashy it looked. The equipment Ark looked at shone with different types of special effects.

But his interest went from the equipment to Mario.

"I am Cayenne."

"Cayenne-nim is the CEO of an agent that mainly dispatches mercenaries in Sidellin. This isn't accurate but it is rumours that there are more than 100 mercenaries scatter all over that belong to him. It is the highest record for a single agent."

"I'm Ryu. Please take care of me."

"Ryu-nim is the CEO of an agent called Arion. Arion only has 7~8 employees but they are all high level users. Ryu-nim's staff has enough skills to take down a large group of opponents."

Mario gave out the name and relevant information about other users like a vending machine.

"I'm impressed that you remember all this."

“I’m a merchant.”

“Huh? A merchant?”

“Oh, I haven’t introduced myself yet. I’m Mario. Heh, did you flinch because you’ve been calling me Mario in your mind? In fact I deliberately made it like this.”

Mario’s real identity was actually Mario! However he wasn’t an innocent plumber trying to rescue a princess.

“I told you that I’m a merchant. Information is the most important thing to merchants. And I’m familiar with other users. It is profitably to become familiar with other users. Huhuhu! Even female users don’t guard against Mario.”

Mario truly was calculating. But Ark was more startled at his occupation than Mario’s name or background. It was highly likely that this mission would involve a battle against the Rama and Aschulat agents. Therefore the most important thing required for this team was combat. The number of troops was limited so the team needed to be configured around combat power as much as possible. Yet one of the 10 spots was taken by a merchant.

‘Perhaps Mario isn’t an ordinary merchant?’

While Ark was busy thinking.

“Marquis-nim, how long do we have to wait for?”

Cayenne who was introduced a little while ago said with an irritated expression. Then Marquis Martin turned back around and asked.

“Didn’t you hear from the guard? Not everybody participating in the task force has arrived yet.”

“Eh? Isn’t everyone here?”

“10 pioneers from each faction are participating in this mission so that should

be 20 altogether. Including Ark-nim we are 10 people. Rapid also makes the other side 10 people. Haven't all the spots been filled? Then who else are we waiting for?"

"There is still one person remaining."

"One person? What faction does the pioneer belong to?"

"Neither of them. He is....."

Marquis Martin sighed and was about to open his mouth. Then the door opened and a man appeared. Wearing huge iron armour like a medieval knight and carrying a sword on their shoulders and a 1 metre gun in both hands, the 10 people entered with a threatening impression like they were attacking the room. A skull was carved on their chests!

"What the, these guys?"

"Skull? Are they pirates?"

"Wait, that isn't the mark of pirates. A clear, blue skull....."

Then they split in half. They formed two lines to allow a man to walk through. He had black hair, wore a black uniform and black cloak. He had an eyepatch over one eye and his whole atmosphere was dark. The man strode across the room without paying attention to the users in it. His cloak containing the mark of a blue skull waved with every step. Marquis Martin made a startled noise.

"Unbelievable.....I thought His Majesty wouldn't select an ordinary user but....."

"His Majesty? The Emperor of the Galactic Federation?"

"Yes, the last participant is a pioneer that His Majesty selected. No, he received a title of nobility some time ago so he can't be called a pioneer anymore."

“A title of nobility? Then that person is?”

“Yes, that person is Baron Hawk.”

Mario moaned after hearing Marquis Martin’s words. But Ark wasn’t surprised. He didn’t know why they were amazed. Mario noticed Ark scratching his head with a puzzled expression and whispered.

“Seven Swords! Seven Swords!”

“Seven Swords? What are the Seven Swords.....?”

Ferguson explained when he heard what Mario was discussing. The game exclusive news had released a TOP 50 ranking. Of course this ranking varied every week. A users’ rank depended on the situation and new players entering the ranking. That’s why Ferguson was pushed out of 18th spot after a week. However there were some whose ranking didn’t change. They were the users occupying the top 7 spots. Ever since the TOP 50 had been released, they might’ve changed spots but those users had never been pushed out of the 1~7 spots. In other words, they were users on a completely different dimension from Ferguson. Thus they were named the Seven Swords! These 7 users were some of the biggest forces in the space frontier.

“Hawk is considered one of the best and is always part of the top 4 spots. He is always dressed in black armour so he was dubbed the Black Hawk. According to rumours, Hawk already possesses at least 4 space colonies and a fleet of spaceships.”

‘There is already a user with that kind of power?’

Ark looked at the man across the room with new eyes. In any game, a user with overwhelming power would build over time. Ark’s goal was to become such a user. However Galaxian’s service hadn’t even started for 10 months yet. While Ark had been a little too comfortable, another user was already building

that power in the frontier. It wasn't just one user but seven! And one of them was Hawk!

"He really is Hawk."

"Oh my god! Then one of the Seven Swords is participating in this mission?"

"This isn't a joke?"

The users became noisy after confirming it was Hawk. But Hawk just silently approached the couch where Ferguson was sitting. Ferguson sat up with excitement.

"Eh? Eh?"

"Get out of the way, pig."

"What? Ah, no. Huh? Ah! Yes!"

Ferguson jumped up like a pig struck by lightning. Then Hawk naturally sat down on the couch. Hawk's gaze was then directed to the users. Hawk's mouth went up as he gazed at the users divided into two groups. But Hawk quickly returned to his original expression and he started talking in a low voice.

"I am the team leader."

"What? H-Hawk is the leader?"

"The leader isn't going to be a NPC from the federation?"

Some users murmured with confusion. Hawk didn't even look at them.

"I will now give you the instructions. From now on I will give you 4 days. I don't care whether you use that time to organize your troops or supplies. I will leave the troops and supplies up to you. 4 days from now we will gather at the Turan Hive located on the southern tip of the Igracia constellation in the frontier. Any person who doesn't arrive in time will be withdrawn."

“So one-sidedly.....”

“I thought we were leaving today?”

“What are you talking about? Today is just the meeting day.”

“Anybody dissatisfied with this should withdraw now.”

Hawk interrupted the people complaining and surveyed the room.

“I’ll tell you now. I’m not interested in what the nobles of the federation think. My only concern is finding out information about the magic circle and antimatter. Of course, my final purpose is the compensation. How many people here are 100% certain they can get the reward?”

“That.....”

“The Rama and the Aschulat.....”

“I’m convinced. I believe that anyone who follows me will be able to receive the same compensation. I’m the only one that can do that. As I said, I’ll leave the choice up to you.”

The users started to stir again at Hawk’s words.

“Are you sure?”

“If Hawk who is one of the Seven Swords talks like that.....”

“We can do it! We can get the information about the magic circle and antimatter before the Rama and Aschulat!”

“Okay! I will follow Hawk!”

“Me too!”

‘What? That guy?’

Ark looked at Hawk with astounded eyes. Until now the users had been

disgruntled with Hawk's one-sided commands. It was natural. They would accept it if it was a NPC but nobody would like receiving commands from another user. Especially if the users had a lot of lose. However Hawk changed their attitudes with just a few words. They were affected by the name Seven Swords but he knew how to deal with people.

'I guess he isn't one of the Seven Swords for nothing.'

"I leave it here."

Hawk stopped speaking and got off the couch. And he walked in the middle of his subordinates like when he came in. But he hesitated while walking past Ark and turned his head.

"Are you Ark?"

"So?"

Ark replied in a curt voice. He was brusque even in the first meeting. Ark had no reason to show him respect. But Hawk just stretched out his hand like he wasn't interested in Ark's attitude.

"I wanted to say hello. I heard a lot about you from the federation TV. I wanted to meet you at least once and now we're on the same team. I will expect a lot from you in the future."

"I will try."

Ark said as he shook Hawk's hand.

"Wah, the reception of a user who received the Hero title really is different."

"A Seven Sword greeted him."

"Damn, this is the difference between our careers."

Their voices were mixed with envy and admiration. However this was just

unpleasant for Ark. The other users had misunderstood something.

They were overwhelmed with the Seven Swords business card and the Hawk took over the atmosphere with his charisma. But Hawk was still a user. It would be different if this was a NPC but he was a user. Ark didn't want to be envied because of another user's fame. His pride wasn't the only reason why he thought it was unpleasant. There was a sharp light in Hawk's eyes. He didn't get a good feeling from those eyes.

‘What on earth? This guy?’

Space 2: Unexpected Visitors

SPACE 2. Unexpected Visitors

“What? This uncomfortable feeling is?”

He had received an offer from Marquis Martin to join the 2nd investigation team. Ark hadn't thought it would be that difficult. The federation would hire pioneers who would fly to the frontier to meet up with the 1st team and investigate the suspicious areas. And if they found something then it would be a success. He had thought that about the investigation team. However the situation was more complicated than he thought. The aristocrat nobles were fighting so the team was split in half.

The agents of all 3 powers had received the quest to find information about the magic circle and antimatter. Therefore all users on the frontier could be competitors. Even if they were on the same team, half of the users were enemies. This internal fissure was a penalty for all participants involved. Ark was also in a more disadvantageous position compared to the others.

‘The saying is that you reap what you sow but.....’

Jyubel and Laius had teamed up in a plot to take S-20 from him. Ark solved that conspiracy through his Water Cleaning strategy and used the evidence to install the necessary facilities in his sector. As expected, nothing in this world was free. Thanks to that incident Ark attracted the attention of Marquis Jyubel, an influential noble. And Jyubel didn't hesitate to express his affection (?). He hired Rapid and Valencia. His aim was to interfere with Ark. That wasn't the only worrisome thing. The Emperor had placed Hawk, one of the Seven Swords in charge. Ark didn't know why but the look Hawk gave him wasn't ordinary.

‘I might just be overly sensitive but.....’

Ark had good senses. Whenever he got a sinister premonition it was highly likely that his feeling would be correct. Ark had received a warning message when he shook Hawk’s hand.

-Somehow this guy is my enemy!

.....Was what it told him. Rapid and Valencia. And now Hawk.

‘Maybe I shouldn’t participate in the investigation team.’

In this situation it might be better for him to proceed with the <Dark Omen> quest alone. But if he backed out now than it would seem like he was scared of Rapid and Valencia. Ark’s pride wouldn’t allow it. And he already had no choice.

“Please sign here.”

Shortly after the meeting ended. Officials belonging to the Domestic Affairs department passed around a document to sign and an information window popped up.

<Dark Omen (Pioneer Quest)>

+ Sub quest: Formation of the Galactic Federation’s Investigation Team

You had demonstrated exceptional qualities through several events. Thanks to that, you have gained the trust of Marquis Martin and gained an invitation to participate as a member of the investigation team.

The contract period is one month. The compensation will depend on the findings of the investigation team. In addition, special compensation will be given to the individual that contributes the most. But if you withdraw from the team without satisfying the contract period then you will need to pay 3 times the penalty.

Difficulty: –

He had signed a contract!

“This is a down payment. Use it as expenses.”

-You have received 3,000 gold.

And he got money as a deposit! Now he couldn't withdraw even if he wanted to. Well, he had no intention of quitting halfway.

‘Yes, that’s it. There is no need to worry about that now. And the contract deposit is 3,000 gold. Those guys, if I don’t let them interfere for 1 month then I’ve gained 3,000 gold even if there are no results.’

In fact, this was already a huge compensation. Of course this wasn’t something that everyone can receive. It required a high contribution with the federation as well as being friendly with an influential noble. All users who met these conditions and joined the team would be given the bonus.

‘If I do nothing and hold up for 1 month then this will be my money.’

The thought eased his mind. Of course he had no intention of just killing time. The deposit was only 3,000 gold. If they succeeded then the fee received would be even more than that. And if he obtained information about the antimatter before the other faction then he could get a bonus from Marquis Martin. This was a great opportunity to clear up the <Investigate the Negative Energy> quest from the Elim's Memory as well. It was only for 1 month! If he made an effort then he could gain a lot!

'There is no guarantee what will happen when I start investigating the space frontier. I was annoyed when I heard Hawk telling us to gather in 4 days but now the situation is different. I have to be prepared to cope with any variables.'

He needed to gather troops as well as distribute supplies. And the duration of the contract was 1 month. In the meantime he needed to organize some things in S-20 as well as give instructions to his employees. The many things he had to do flashed through his head.

'Yes, now isn't the time to worry about Valencia and Rapid. If I deduct 1 day for travel time, I need to take advantage of the 3 days to prepare. There are many things I need to put in order. Let's hurry and return to S-20.'

"But before that....."

Ark's gaze headed towards Tori sitting in the cockpit.

"Tori, start the Silver Star. The destination is Charem."

"Understood."

Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku!

The engine started vibrating at Tori's answer.

"Output OK, gas balance OK, coordinates input OK, we will begin movement!
3, 2, 1, start!"

Kwaaaaaaah-!

The Silver Star disappeared in a flash of light.

“The Emperor won that time.”

In the office of Domestic Affairs in the central federation headquarters. Three people were sitting in a lavishly ornamented room. One of them was Marquis Jyubel, the owner of this office. And the other two were Valencia and Rapid. Jyubel had a scowl on his face.

“I expected that he would have an ulterior motive but I never thought he would attract Hawk.”

“But has anything changed? A 3rd power has taken the leadership role. If we can drag him to our side.....”

Valencia spoke with a craft expression. Then Jyubel laughed and said.

“Do you think I’ve never tried it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think aristocrats don’t do any work and have a banquet every night? A noble needs to expand their power with connections. A noble’s power depends on the outstanding characters supporting them. And Hawk has emerged as a leading pioneer. Naturally I tried to contact him many times. But I was ignored very neatly. Especially now that Hawk is following the Emperor. Trying to entice him might just worsen the situation.”

“Then what do we do now?”

“Let’s see.....”

Jyubel thought for a while.

“Luckily it seems like Martin also doesn’t have any relationship with Hawk. Martin’s face was truly puzzled when Hawk appeared. The problem is Ark.”

“Ark!”

Valencia cried out with hostile eyes.

“Among all the pioneers gathered, Ark was the only one Hawk talked to. If Hawk and Ark joins hands.....”

“It didn’t seem to be a good atmosphere.”

Rapid who was listening silently spoke for the first time. Jyubel and Valencia narrowed their eyes at Rapid who continued talking.

“From what I saw.....”

No, he was about to continue. Then a guard knocked and entered.

“Marquis-nim, a guest is here to see you.”

Kwaaaaaaaah-!

There was a sudden explosion in a calm sky. The clouds were separated from a shockwave and a ship appeared. Inside the ship a hamster was busily moving his hands.

“The system is error free! We’ve arrived at our destination!”

“Good work.”

The one who answered was Ark.

“As expected, arriving home is the best.”

Ark said as he looked at the thriving village that was S-20. S-20 wasn’t a trivial sector any longer. The size was 2 kilometres in diameter with a blue shield surrounding the boundary and a building with the latest facilities in the centre.

This building was the sector administrative office that used to be the Laius research centre. There was even a large artificial lake! But the truly flourishing thing was the pioneers. In other words, it was the users. No matter how large the village was, it would be no use if there were no people. That was the biggest change in S-20. People were flooding every street! Previously the population had been 3,000 people. But now S-20 had at least twice that number. The secret to the drastic population growth was the exclusive route.

“As expected, it was great that I applied for the exclusive route!”

Ark might have the Silver Star but there were very few users in the Galaxian who actually had private ships or airships. A spacecraft would be a minimum of at least 10,000 gold. An airship was cheaper but the price was still taxing. Some people would receive it from sponsors but that also wasn't free. A sponsor and user had the relationship of employer and employee.

Just like office workers received a pay check, the sponsor would give a monthly salary when completing one of their quests and the mileage would build up. If they saved this salary then they could receive an airship or spaceship but that wasn't an easy task. Therefore the majority of users still used the federation's transport ships. That's why the population stayed at 2,000~3,000 people despite Slayer, Leon and Melina's advertising. That was S-20's limit when there wasn't a trade route there.

That situation changed after establishing an exclusive route. Pioneers poured out every few hours as a transport ship arrived! The exclusive route had only been established for 5 days and the population of the sector had already doubled. If this trend continued then it would increase to 3, no 4 times the population! The increase in pioneers meant a more active commerce and increase income for Ark.

“Well, I guess it won't take that long.”

It had only been 3 days since Ark went to Rakunka. The shopping area had already increased by one store. And another 5 trailers were lined up in front of the sector administration office. They were probably merchants who heard rumours of S-20 and were waiting for a store permit.

“Hyung-nim, we’ve landed.”

In the meantime Tori had landed the Silver Star.

“Is that guy Ellain still in the infirmary?”

“He is in bad shape.”

“That brat! His senior had to steer the ship while suffering sleep deprivation while the newcomer gets to just lie down in the infirmary? He needs to be taught some discipline. I can’t accept it. He needs to be disciplined before he gets worse.”

“Well, it’s not really like that but.....”

Ark looked back at the infirmary.

“Just leave him alone for now. It isn’t unreasonable since this is his first take taking a spaceship.”

Ellain was the strongest warrior of the Kusan clan on Rakunka. He fought equally with Ark on the desert terrain and survived against the Myutal. However Ellain had a fatal weakness Ark never expected.

“L-Leader-nim. M-my body is strange. I suddenly feel dizzy.....”

He became sick shortly after sailing on the Silver Star. Ellain had stuttered with a pale and sweaty expression.

-Your crew member Ellain has space motion sickness!

<All of Ellain's stats have been decrease by 50%. His physical abilities have deteriorated and he can't use his skills because of headaches and nausea.

<If you don't put him in the infirmary and take appropriate action then his abilities might be lost forever>

That message popped up! It was the inevitable result when he thought about it. Rakunka wasn't part of the 3 powers so its science and civilization hadn't developed. Naturally Ellain had never been on a ship or navigated the universe. It was like a person's first time flying on a plane. He had no immunity and developed space motion sickness. Thanks to that he had stayed in the infirmary for the whole ride..

"Bah, space motion sickness? Even children don't develop that these days."

Tori started to show even more of an attitude towards Ellain.

'I accepted because he is a high level warrior but I can't use him when travelling long distances in the future.'

"Then should he be moved to the crew's quarters?"

"Just leave him there. I'm going to stop by the administrative office to check on the sector so you should examine the Silver Star. We'll be in the space frontier for a month so things should be meticulously checked in order to avoid any problems."

"I don't get a break?"

"You want to take a break?"

“No, it’s not I want to rest but.....”

“If you want to take a break. You can spend the next few days moaning next to Ellain.”

Ark lifted his fist and Tori quickly shook his head.

“Ah, no! This hamster will be delighted to serve Hyung-nim!”

He picked up the tool box and shot off like an arrow.

“At least he is still listening to me.”

Tori was once the owner of a junkyard but now he had been caught by Ark. Ark was his employer. He followed Ark after the incident in the Harmadon constellation but it wasn’t that easy to change his character. The bruising would fade and his attitude would stop being so polite. But Ark never expectation that his mental state would last forever.

‘Sooner or later I will have to catch him again.’

However he had to put many things in advance before leaving for a month. Now wasn’t the time to be training the hamster. Ark was thinking that as he exited the ship.

“Hyung-nim!”

A group of people ran over before his feet even touched the ground. They were Mellin, Hegel, Berad and the rest of the Royal Guards. They had seen the Silver Star landing. But Ark was puzzled when he saw them.

“Why are you guys here? Shouldn’t you be clearing out the bottom layer of Mt. Fargo’s dungeon?”

Before leaving for Rakunka, he had directed all the members to continue clearing out the dungeon except for Mellin and Hegel who he left in charge of the food production factory. But they were all here. They couldn’t have cleared

out the lower layer in just a few days.

“Was there a problem?”

“It isn’t a problem.....”

The members looked at each other and laughed.

“There are people who have been waiting for Hyung-nim since yesterday.”

“People waiting for me?”

“It is us.”

The answer came from behind the members. Ark reflexively turned his head with confusion. There were two men behind the members. They were both people Ark knew. But he had forgotten about them until now. He hadn’t seen them for 4 months. However he could remember their faces immediately.

“Hamad! Asuran!”

That was the name of the two men. They were part of the crew that followed Ark on Beltana. In fact, they were the first two members Ark visited after returning from Beltana. Originally Ark had gathered 15 prisoners on Beltana. At that time, Ark gathered the Royal Guards by handing out food to the starving. Ark had also pardoned 5 prisoners in order to gain a sense of kinship. Two of them gave him skills or a gun while Milan, Hamad and Asuran gave him a quest for a later reward. It was the <Asuran will Return the Favour>, <Hamad’s Compensation> and <Milan’s Proposal> quests. Among them there was no need to explain what happened with Milan.

The problem was Hamad and Asuran. Originally Hamad was a merchant with some big stores in Julius. However Ark discovered that he had entrusted his store to his employees and was betrayed by them. He only had one shop remaining and it was on the brink of closure.

‘This isn’t a situation where I can extort money.’

Asuran’s predicament was even worse. He was a gangster with quite a few subordinates in the city of Sidellin. However he was on the federation’s blacklist since been drafted and couldn’t restart his business under the scrutiny of the androids. Therefore he had been starving every day.

‘This guy is also like this.’

The two quests were a dud. However Ark didn’t give up on the compensation.

‘Wait? Haman can’t engage in trade because of the interference of his former employees. Meanwhile Asuran and his subordinates are starving to death. Asuran’s subordinates didn’t betray him but they can’t find any work. What if I combine these two?’

That thought popped into his head. Ark immediately convinced Asuran to take his henchmen and visit Hamad. But Ark couldn’t stay behind to watch. At that time Ark had been travelling around with Marquis Martin to promote the federation. And he had forgotten about it after Mt Fargo, Athamas, the magic circle *etc.* Now Hamad and Asuran had shown up in S-20.

“I see you haven’t forgotten our names.”

“Well, that....”

“I’m sorry Hyung-nim.”

Asuran said as he looked at Mellin.

“We didn’t contact you.”

“Do you think we’re at the same level? The amount of time we’ve served Hyung-nim is different. And you know what put us at ease? The fact that you’ve returned to Istana from Beltana without suffering any harm. This sector also wasn’t obtained freely.”

Asuran nodded at Berad's words.

"I recognize your efforts."

He turned back to Ark and said.

"That's why I came here with Hamad hyung-nim."

"What?"

"I'll explain."

Hamad cut in. He looked completely different from his time in Julius. Hamad was an old man who was a similar age to Mellin. He had several -50 degrees weather for several months and was disappointed from the betrayal of his subordinates so his health suffered. But now his appearance was rejuvenated and he looked 20 years younger.

'This seems to have been settled after Asuran joined him.'

The explanation that Ark expected followed afterwards. After Ark's visit, Asuran had summoned his subordinates and walked 800 kilometres to meet Hamad. And a grand epic unfolded on the street that Hamad's store belonged to.

"Heh, Hyung-nim. Just retire now."

The betrayal of his trusted men!

"I would back down like this!"

The previous boss who couldn't resign!

"Hamad hyung-nim, Ark hyung-nim sent me!"

The appearance of a past colleague!

"I'll pack back Ark hyung-nim's mercy by smashing them!"

A bloody fight between the two organizations took place! Showdown! Showdown! A story that wasn't inferior to a gangster movie unfolded. Originally Hamad was quite resourceful. He had moved to Istana empty handed and managed to build up 3 stores with 30 employees thanks to his resourcefulness. However he had no power once his subordinates betrayed him. But Arsenal who came to help had this power. Hamad's cunning and Asuran's power meant they defeated the former employees one by one. And he was finally able to regain most of his property after 3 months.

"It was around that time that we heard the news."

This was right after Ark returned from Athamas. Slayer, Leon and Mellin appeared on federation TV to promote S-20.

"That's how we knew that you were this sector's administrator. It is why we came so late. We needed some time to clean up my properties."

"Clean up my properties?"

Ark asked with a puzzled expression. Then Asuran started beating his chest and said.

"I've followed Hyung-nim from our time in Beltana. I realized something since following Hyung-nim on Beltana. I'm not fit to be a boss. And I finally found a boss that I can follow. That is Hyung-nim. That's why I came to Hyung-nim. Hyung-nim, please accept my loyalty!"

"I also have the same idea."

Hamad nodded and continued.

"I was betrayed by my subordinates and realized that I'm not fit to be a boss. I'm only a merchant. Therefore I need a reliable partner that I can trust. And right now you are the most reliable person. But I didn't simply come because of

loyalty like Hamad. Like I said, I'm a merchant. Profit is emphasized above anything else. So I decided to find out more about S-20. And I judged that it is worth investing in. I packed up my assets in Julius in order to invest it here."

"Hyung-nim, why do you have to say things so complicatedly? Don't you want to be with Hyung-nim? You were dying to do business with Hyung-nim so why are you giving a 5 minute speech? Why are you so embarrassed?"

"Hmm hmm, that is....."

Hamad stammered and blushed as he looked away from Ark. He scratched his head with an embarrassed expression and nodded.

"Something like that. I have fewer opportunities now that I'm older. You're giving me a chance to recover my strength. After our experience on Beltana, I would like to be partners with you until I die. That's why I'm willing to invest my entire fortune."

The 5 trailers parked in front of the administrative office belonged to Hamad. These contained all of Hamad's assets from Julius.

'I had forgotten.....'

Ark had been confused until now. However there was no reason to refuse Hamad and Asuran's offer. No, he didn't want to. S-20 still needed a lot of work. The larger S-20 became, the more businesses and staff were needed. That's why he increased his agent rating before leaving for Rakunka. But these employees came to him first. Hamad and Asuran were the rare NPCs who are pioneers! That only would make them beneficial as an employee. However Hamad also came with quite a substantial investment as a dowry. The sector was steadily growing but Ark was still suffering from a lack of funds so he was thankful for it!

"I understand. I'll accept this investment."

Ark shook their hands and the information window popped up.

-Asuran has joined Dark Eden as an intern.

Name: Asuran (NPC ☆☆☆☆) Occupation: Fighter

Level: 75 Related Skills: Face of Terror, Taunt,
Defense-related.....

* Additionally, Asuran’s 26 subordinates have been registered as auxiliary personnel.

-Hamad has joined Dark Eden as an intern.

Name: Hamad (NPC ☆☆☆☆) Occupation:
Merchant

Level: 98 Related Skills: Trade, Book keeping, Tax
relations.....

* Hamad’s assets have been changed to investment
funds for Dark Eden.

He had gained 2 new recruits! At the same time Hamad’s property was registered as investment funds. In fact, Dark Eden was a corporation. The funds to found the compensation were given by the Royal Guards from the loot

obtained on Beltana's battlefield. This time there was an influx from Hamad's property. Therefore it was necessary to rearrange the shares again.

'Dark Eden is a company after all. I have to properly use the agent system before it becomes more complicated. Now is a perfect time with the influx of new investment.'

But right now he had other work to do.

"Asuran and Hamad, you guys enter the office first. I have somewhere I need to briefly go to. We'll talk in more detail later."

Ark hurriedly ran to the artificial lake.

"This way."

A uniformed man opened the door.

"I'll wait outside. Call when the meeting is finished."

The soldier saluted and went outside before closing the door. The young man slowly glanced around the room. It was a small square room only 3 metres wide. A man in his 30s with a haggard expression was sitting at a desk. A pained voice flowed out from the youth's mouth.

"Uncle."

"It's been a month."

"How have you been?"

"As you can see, I am doing fine. This is heaven compared to prison. I also get visitors so it is better than solitary."

The man replied with a smile. However the youth couldn't smile. He couldn't laugh when seeing his uncle's tired appearance.

“Please endure it a bit more. It won’t take long.”

“I’m doing well so there is plenty of time.”

“Look at uncle’s appearance. That is you doing well? No, how can I leave it alone when uncle is trapped in a place like this?”

“I have sinned. Those who sinned should pay the price.”

“I don’t think so. What sin did uncle do? It is Global Exos who should pay for their sins, not uncle. They were the ones who hassled auntie to make the game even though she was dying and they took the game from uncle. Those lousy bastards!”

“I also thought this at first.”

The man sighed and shook his head.

“But that was a mistake. No, to be honest I knew in the first place. I just needed a target to blame. I couldn’t live if I didn’t blame anyone. As a result, I made an irreversible mistake. I tried to destroy the thing she loved the most with my own hands and numerous people were embroiled in the damage. Among them there was also a person who fell into a coma. All due to my misunderstanding.....”

The man was Park Woo-seong. He was the main programmer of New World. At that time he was promised to marry Yuna, another member of the production team. Yuna fell terminally ill during the creation of the game and Park Woo-seong advised her to rest. Yet Yuna continued working from her hospital bed and eventually died a few months later. Park Woo-seong became furious after her death. That anger was targeted towards their creation, New World!

‘If it wasn’t for New World then she wouldn’t have suffered and died! No, she

might not have even fallen ill! New World is the monster that sucked the life from Yuna! I made the monster! So I will destroy it with my own hand!’

He used his anger to build a powerful artificial intelligence with the capacity of self-thinking. Now that program Lucifer was holding a nuclear power plant hostage and threatening the government of Korea. A sigh of regret flowed from Park Woo-seong’s mouth.

“That spectre is still alive and is bringing a lot of damage to many people.”

“Is that also uncle’s fault? It is the government’s responsibility that Lucifer occupied the nuclear power plant. It is the result of their greed. But I’m thankful to Lucifer. Now I have the chance to help uncle.”

“I heard from Chief Moon. The reward you wanted if you succeeded. But I.....”

“I won’t hear another word.”

The young man interrupted with a stubborn expression.

“Uncle raised me alone so you’re like a parent to me. If uncle had just explained a few years ago then I would’ve done anything to help uncle. But you just disappeared without giving me an opportunity to help. Now that chance has come because of the Lucifer that uncle created. I won’t miss this chance.”

“Chang-soo.....”

Park Woo-seong looked at his nephew with a complicated expression. He was currently inside the NIS. The government had wanted his help to take care of the artificial intelligence so they brought Park Woo-seong from prison to the NIS. However his identity was still a prisoner. In addition, he was a main witness to Lucifer’s occupation of the nuclear power plant. Of course he was supervised by the NIS 24 hours a day and he couldn’t meet any outsiders. That’s why his nephew Park Chang-soo got involved in the Lucifer case.

Park Chang-soo's profession was a pro-gamer. He had been influenced by Park Woo-seong in virtual reality games since childhood and he had been one of the most powerful users in the game Hell Lion. However his character and properties suddenly disappeared from Hell Lion. The NIS had chosen 50 gamers to go against Lucifer. Park Chang-soo was one of the strongest gamers in Hell Lion so he had also been selected. Park Chang-soo had two conditions when accepting the NIS' offer. One of them was the right to visit Park Woo-seong once a month. And if he succeeded in reaching the ultimate goal then Park Woo-seong would be freed.

"I'm different from other users. I'm throwing everything into this. And my preparations have ended. I'll do whatever it takes to reach the ultimate goal before Lucifer and save uncle. I will also step on Ark."

"Ark?"

Park Woo-seong suddenly raised his head. A smile formed on Park Chang-soo's face.

"Of course. Ark. If it wasn't for his actions then uncle would've got rid of New World. He interfered with uncle and in exchange became an advisor in Global Exos. If Ark didn't have the master code then I would've moved to New World and smashed him."

"Ark wasn't the one who disturbed me. Rather he is the person who stopped me from doing something stupid. If it wasn't for Ark then I would've got rid of the last legacy that Yuna left me."

"Then you're telling me to thank him?"

"That's not what I meant. I have no intention of stopping your plan in Galaxian. Lucifer must be stopped somehow. Therefore Ark and the other users aren't enemies. We need to stop Lucifer. And the users are your colleagues."

“That’s not right.”

Park Chang-soo shook his head.

“Only the person who reaches the ultimate goal before Lucifer will receive the reward from the government. Thus we might have the same goal but the 50 gamers are also my enemy. If I can’t be that person then it would be better to let the power plant explode. Because the government should pay the price for trying to selfishly use Lucifer.”

“Chang-soo, what are you saying?”

“Don’t worry, that won’t happen as long as I’m there. Ark might be known as the legendary gamer but I will reach the ultimate goal first.”

A sharp light spread in Park Chang-soo’s eyes.

Slosh, slosh. Chwaaaaak!

Waves flowed as a large sphere floated to the surface of the water. The identity of the sphere was a creature that looked like a balloon at first glance. The tentacles attached stretched out while holding fish. The creature with the rounded body moved across the lake and climbed up onto the land. And he looked around with glossy eyes.

-Oh! Ark, you’ve returned!

“Yes, I arrived a short time ago.”

Ark laughed and nodded his head. There were some strange looking creatures that appeared in the universe. The identity of this creature was none other than Bakum. He was the leader of the Charenjok that used to live near Charem. After crushing Marquis Jyubel’s plot, Ark had finished the channel connecting S-20 to the waterfall lake and created an artificial lake inside the sector. And he had

used the Silver Star to move the Charenjok and the food production factory. The place where Bakum surfaced was an artificial lake.

“Was Elder-nim hunting?”

–I’m a little old so isn’t this much just playing?

Bakum approached him slowly because of the fish being held.

–The channel connects the lakes but not that many fish have come through here. If we want to make a large quantity of food for 24 hours then we need to swim to the waterfall lake. In addition, the fish here is a lot different from Charem. Look. Isn’t it incredibly sharp?

Bakum pointed to the sharp snout of the fish. The fish that lived in the vicinity of S-20 and the waterfall lake was different from Charem where the Charenjok used to live. They might only be level 20 but they were still classified as a monster fish! The evidence was the sharp teeth.

–These guys tried to bite me. There are only a few of them but the fish can be dangerous. So multiple people are required to catch the fish. Anyway, there is no choice but to have insufficient workers.

However there were some benefits. A fish didn’t give any experience. But it was different if the fish were classified as monsters. It was difficult to catch the fish but they received more benefits when they threw it in the fish food maker!

Tal tal tal tal! Tal tal tal tal!

-The Charenjok has earned experience!

-The Charenjok has earned experience.....

The Charenjok earned experience once the fish were changed into fish paste bars. Thanks to that, the level 30 Charenjok had reached level 35 after moving to S-20. Of course their stats also went up! They also started catching the monster fish faster. That wasn't all.

-Space food (Mega Piranha)

A food made from the Mega Piranha that likes in the lake in the eastern Outlands. The Mega Piranha is a carnivorous species so it is richer in proteins compared to others. Unfortunately it will cause abdominal pain from the toxins if swallowed directly but it can make a space food high in nutrition if entered into a space food maker.

<Satiety +60%, Health and Mental Power will recover by 200 over 3 minutes>

The fish in the northern lake only increase satiety by 40%. However the space food made of the Mega Piranha increase satiety by 60%. There was also an additional effect of recovering health and mental power by 200. The improvement in quality led to a price increase! It sold like hotcakes even when he raised the price from 50 copper to 1 silver. Of course the profit also doubled. The food production factory that used to earn 14 gold and 40 silver in a day increased it to 28 gold and 80 silver after moving to S-20. Ark had a 30% share so he earned 8 gold and 60 silver. The total for one month would be 260 gold.

Ark's income also doubled as well as the Charenjok's!

–The last few months I've been living differently. At this age I can finally live happily. This is all thanks to you. I want to thank you once again on behalf of the Charenjok.

Bakum grinned happily as he bit into the Mega Piranha. Then he suddenly spoke again.

–By the way, did you come here to say something?

“Yes, something like that.”

–Something like that?

“I want to return the money you lent me the other day.”

Ark had borrowed 900 gold to expand the sector when presented with the <Audit Command> quest.

-Ah, yes. There was that.

“I wanted to repay you but not in money.”

–Another method?

Bakum was puzzled by Ark's words.

–No, that.....as you know the biggest reason we're raising money is to buy our kin who are Java's slaves. It's okay if you can't pay back the money right away but.....even if it takes some time, shouldn't you return it as money?

“There is no need for that.”

Then yelling was heard from behind.

-Elder-nim!

–Ah, no? You guys surely.....

Bakum flinched as he looked around. Then Bakum's eyes landed towards the Silver Star and the octopuses running out of it. There were exactly 34 of them. They were.....

–Why are you guys here?

–It is all thanks to Ark-nim!

-Ark?

–Yes, Ark-nim paid our ransom to Java! Now we're free!

–Then you're saying.....

“Well, it is like this.”

Ark replied with a smile. That's why he visited Charem before returning to S-20. Once again, the Charenjok's biggest reason for earning money was to free the slaves caught by Lord Java of Charem. They worked 24 hours around the clock at the food production factory and already earned 70% of the required funds.

'If this continues then they will gather the funds in the next two weeks. But even if they gather the money, I'll be joining the task force so I can't bring the octopuses to S-20 for one month. Anyway, the food manufacturing plant is already established so it is better to bring the octopuses first.'

That's why he visited Charem and bought the octopuses!

–Heok! Those cephalopods?

–The light brown.....Honey, is that really you?

–Oh, Daddy! Daddy is back! Daddy!

–Oh! Hey guys! Honey!

The octopuses were reunited after a few years! They were all octopuses but

Ark could tell the families with one glance. The aunt who inserted fish into the food maker, the young man who fished in the lake, the young boys and girls playing around and Bakum. They were in tears from the return of their family members.

And.....wriggle wriggle! Wriggle wriggle! Their legs twisted around each other as they embraced with joy.

–Oh! Really.....such a day really came.....

Bakum who was in tears as he watched the scene turned to Ark.

–You really are someone sent from the heavens. God must’ve commiserated with us losing our hometown and sent someone to help the Charenjok. Not only did you provide us with a job and security, now you’ve saved our kin. I don’t know how I can repay the favour.

“Huh? No, that.....”

Ark was embarrassed by Bakum’s words. He had paid Java 1,000 gold for the octopuses. But he had only borrowed 900 gold from Bakum. His previous 30% profit was 270 gold. Ark had paid Java 1,000 gold so he was actually owed 370 gold. Ark was the type that couldn’t give up even 1 copper. He would be absent for 1 month so the octopuses would need to pay him 370 gold as well as the future proceeds. So it was like he was the one who loaned them money. Yet Bakum was thinking that Ark just gave it to them. Ark became embarrassed as he tried to find a way to explain it. Eventually he just sighed. He scratched his head as he looked at the octopuses dripping with tears of joy.

‘Damn, how can I say that I’m lending them money in this atmosphere?’

The words couldn’t fall from Ark’s mouth.

‘When thinking about it, Bakum didn’t hesitate to lend me the money without

any conditions. I can't push them heartlessly. 370 gold. It isn't a small amount but proceeds will steadily flow in from the Charenjok. Yes, let's just think of it as an investment in my relationship with the Charenjok.'

Ark sighed and shook his head.

"No. Don't talk like that. I have a lot to do so I'll leave now."

—Wait!

Then Bakum grabbed Ark. He looked determined.

-Do you still have the Charenjok's Token? Haven't you handled it for a while?

Then the other octopuses looked at Bakum with surprise.

—Elder-nim! Perhaps.....?

-Don't say anything! We owe Ark a lot more for the friendship he showed us. As the Elder of the Charenjok, I am obligated to return this favour. That is the Charenjok's pride! We have to pay back our benefactor! Now Ark! Give me the Charenjok's Token!

Bakum held out his leg with trembling eyes.

'This atmosphere?'

Ark had a feeling at that time. He remembered the octopuses' reaction the first time he met Bakum. Ark quickly passed him the Charenjok's Token.

—Ohhhhh! Haaayaahh!

Bakum bit into the leg that he was holding up. Then the leg started attaching to the Charenjok's Token. And it stayed on the head for a long time. Finally the leg dried out and there were small protrusions on the head of the Charenjok's Token.

-A special feature has been added to the Charenjok's

Token!

-Charenjok's Token (Special) Lv: 3

Item Type: Recovery

The Charenjok's Token was originally sold as a souvenir. It is cute and could sometimes be used as a recovery item so a lot was sold to pioneers. But the Charenjok's Token has a hidden secret. This secret can only be activated by the power of a Charenjok Elder.

However the elder has to sacrifice a part of their body in order to awaken the power.

Not many Charenjok elders would be willing to sacrifice a part of their body unless they need to repay a pioneer. Therefore not many pioneers know about the true strength of the token.

<Recovery from poison, your health will recover by 3 every 4 seconds for 10 minutes Cool down time: 1 hour>

-First Evolution (Growth): When enough experience points are accumulated, the basic recovery skills can be elevated.

2nd Evolution (Ink Jet): The token has the ability to produce the ink naturally created by the Charenjok. When the ink jet hits the opponent's face, it can cause the 'blind' state for 30 seconds. The Ink Jet can be fired 5 times and it requires 10 hours to recharge.

He had steadily used the Charenjok's Token and it had increased to level 3! The recovery effect rose from 3 every 4 seconds so he could regain 450 health in 10 minutes. Ark was able to play the tanker role on Rakunka because of the Charenjok's Token. It was already a helpful item. And now one more new feature had been added. 'Ink Jet' that caused the enemy to become blind! The capability to attack had been added to the token. The effect had increased and he gained a new skill.

'Evolution added separate features from the token levelling up. The first evolution is the growth of the token effect. The second evolution is the Ink Jet. Then there must be a third and fourth evolution. No, there is no doubt about it. But if I want the Charenjok's Token to evolve again.....'

Ark looked at Bakum's legs. Bakum smiled lightly and shook his head.

—Don't pay attention to it.

"Huh?"

-You don't have to worry about my legs. Now the Charenjok can feel pride that we returned the favour. I am pleased even if I lost a leg.

My heart is a lot lighter.

But that wasn't the reason why Ark was looking at Bakum's legs. Bakum had already bit off 2 legs so he still had 6 remaining. In other words, the Charenjok's Token was capable of 6 more evolutions. Of course Ark had some common sense. However he couldn't help feeling greedy at the sight of all those legs. An octopus with all its legs cut off. They would just be like a soccer ball.

'But 2 more is fine! Humans have 2 legs and 2 arms so 4 limbs aren't a hindrance. Yes, the rest are just extra. He can live with no trouble even if another 2 are removed. However the information window states that the Elder will only do it to repay a favour.'

It wouldn't be that easy to take off the next 2 legs. Nothing happened in the world without a reason. That applied even more so in the game. A seed planted in a garden won't grow suddenly. It would be reaped when ready.

'So I have to sow the seeds.'

Then something popped into his head. It was R-14! Burum on R-14 was the one who gave him the Charenjok's Token. Bakum on Istana had been dreaming about reviving the clan. And now Ark had given them a safe place to live and a job. So Bakum was hoping to gather his scattered kinsmen.

'Can I bring Burum's clan to S-20?'

If Bakum was glad then he might bite off another one of his legs! However R-14 was a space station orbiting Earth. Even with warp it would take a whole day of flying. It was impossible for him to fly to R-14 and collect Burum at the moment.

‘I would like to do it straight away.....but at least I know about it so I can do it anytime. The octopuses on R-14 will still be there so I can visit after the completion of this mission. Huhuhu, just wait. I have reserved that leg!’

That’s why Ark was staring at Bakum’s legs. Of course Ark wasn’t dumb enough to voice this.

“I’m glad for the thoughts of the clan. But I’m sorry that you had to give up a part of your body. I truly appreciate Elder-nim’s thoughts. As the Charenjok’s friend, I promise to try my best to revive the clan.”

“Thank you.”

Bakum shook Ark’s hand with one of his legs.

Space 3: MIX-UP

.SPACE 3. MIX-UP

Jjan jjan jjan! Jjan jjan jjan! Jjan jjan jjan!

Sector expansion, shield fence, Fairy, exclusive route *etc.* There were continuous sound effects as S-20 grew rapidly from the many facilities. Now Hamad's money was like pouring oil.

"I disposed of my store and came. I brought the trailer trucks with my goods. These are the items."

Hamad moved towards the 5 trailer trucks. The trailer contained various weapons, armour and supplies.

'I can gain significant funding if I dispose of all this but.....'

There was no reason to do that. Firstly, S-20 wasn't lacking in funds thanks to the contract despite money for those who participated in the investigation team. Second, it was difficult to receive a fair price for resale when all the goods were sold together. However the third reason was the most important. Ark had already secured a land for stores and customers. If stores were built then naturally the number of visitors to the sector would increase.

If a shop was creating in S-20 then goods could be sold at a reasonable price. There would also be a steady revenue through purchase and sales. He wasn't stupid enough to give up a golden egg in order to sell it for a lump sum now!

"We had the same idea."

Hamad also nodded.

“If I was going to sell it that way then I wouldn’t have purchased the trailer trucks. A source of revenue is necessary for agents running a sector. Because money is a burden for companies in the start-up phase. In some cases, just a few hundred gold could cause the business to fail. So it is necessary to make a strong start.”

Ark had also thought that a long time ago. Just because an agent owned a sector didn’t mean that income would be flowing in. Employees were needed for an agent. If he hired employees then he needed to give them a monthly salary. Money from the sector couldn’t be ignored. Marquis Jyubel and the Laius company might’ve installed the shield for free but the maintenance, repairs and shield generator isn’t free. It required quite a bit of money on a regular basis. And he needed to purchase additional facilities to develop the sector further. It would be hard to deal with all that from the merchant’s taxes and pioneers paying the sector fee alone. He needed a more reliable way to gain more income.

‘This is an opportunity for those funds!’

Not a lot of time was necessary to make a store. Ark and Hamad arranged the trailer trucks into a line.

-Hamad’s Department Store <S-20 Retail Store>

A department store operated in S-20.

Various weapons and armours as well as supplies are present!

All goods in this store will be sold at the average

market price of this sector. There is no need to calculate it! You just need to believe in it and buy the goods! Hamad's Department Store is the best choice for all pioneers.

There is everything a pioneer would need.

And a signpost was planted. The five trailer trucks had been changed into stores.

'The problem is the place selected.....'

Currently the best hunting ground for S-20 was Mt. Fargo's dungeon. Therefore the best commercial area was close to the dungeon entrance. But there were already 15 stores located there. Of course there was room for more stores but Hamad's was a department store. If a large scale store occupied a position in the shopping area that was already developed then the existing merchants would complain.

'It will be troublesome if there is friction with the merchants!'

So Ark had selected a place next to the administrative office. It was a place that visitors to the sector would have to go and it was far from the already developed market so the friction with the other merchants would be minimized. That wasn't the only advantage.

"Damn, my bullets decreased at such a time!"

"There's no time. If we're gone too long than other parties might occupy our hunting spot."

"Hurry up and replenish our recovery ampoules, food and bullet!"

Mt. Fargo’s dungeon wasn’t only S-20’s hunting ground. Ark had promoted quite a few hunting grounds apart from the dungeon so pioneers were steadily visiting them. If those pioneers ran out of supplies during hunting then they would naturally ran to the closest store in the sector. These pioneers were a growing trend. In other words, the entrance of the dungeon might be the best shopping district at the moment but that might not continue in the future. That fact that the department store was overflowing with guests when it opened was evidence. The bullets, food and supplies were affordable so it would soon be a firm source of funding. However that wasn’t all Ark’s money.

‘I need to organize this before the system becomes more complicated.’

Ark had a hunch at the time.

‘I didn’t create Dark Eden alone. Most of the money to create it was given by the Royal Guards as an investment. So I need to make this relationship clear.’

Until now there had been no need to do that. He had been busy developing the sector and there was no income. So there was no need to worry about how to split the income. But now things had changed. The sector was starting to climb and it also received an influx of new funds. In addition, the Royal Guards were shareholders as well as employees so they needed regular expenses. Now Ark needed to divide the income into agent funds and person funds as well as determine how to break it up. This was the result of the first stockholder meeting.

– Agent: Dark Eden (Lv. 2) -CEO: Ark (R-02788)

Assigned City: S-20

Assigned Employees: 18/30

* There are a total of 14 shareholders including the CEO.

* Current Equity Holdings of Dark Eden

1. CEO: Ark -50%
2. Founders: Mellin and 10 others -30%
3. Gained Equity through Investments: Hamad, Asuran – 20%

Ark was the CEO so he received 50% of the shares. Hamad and Asuran who also brought an investment gained shares as well. Mellin and the other members had invested 16,800 gold to create the agent. Meanwhile the goods Hamad and Asuran brought on the trailers were worth 40,000 gold. However Mellin and the others were the founders. And they also played a decisive role in the sector. This was the part that convinced Hamad and Asuran.

“The value of the initial capital for Dark Eden and S-20 is equivalent to at least 20 million gold in my judgement. I think 20% is appropriate for 40,000 gold.”

“I’m not interested in any complicated numbers. Hyung-nim is Hyung-nim. I’ll just believe in Hyung-nim and follow you. As long as I don’t starve.”

“We have no complaints.”

Mellin approved on behalf of the other members. Thus the issue with the shares was organized. However the money management problem didn’t end with just that. Currently there were 3 significant sources of revenue for Dark Eden. The tax income and charges from S-20, the Charenjok’s food production factory and Hamad’s Department Store. The staff like Jay, Tori, Bain *etc.* needed

salaries, the dividends from the shares as well as funds necessary for the management of the sector. Calculations on such a large scale would become complicated. However Ark had no need to learn accounting.

“From now on Hamad will be handling the money management.”

“I thought you would say so.”

Hamad smiled as an ‘!’ popped above his head.

-Hamad is satisfied and will accept the job.

<When giving a NPC a job that matches their skills,
the achievement will increase>

That message popped up! This was information that Ark only recently discovered. Users tended to pick abilities that fit their occupation. A healer was necessary for tanks to avoid being killed. It was the same for NPCs. Each one had a role fit for them according to their qualifications and the ‘!’ would pop up like with Hamad. If it didn’t fit then things like ‘?’, ‘;;’ and ‘OTL’ would appear. Anyway!

“The agent’s funding situation has been put in order.”

As expected the ‘!’ appeared on top of Hamad after he was handed the right documents.

<Dark Eden’s Finances>

Current cash reserves for the agent: 6,543 gold

Regular Income: Food production factory-daily average is 28 gold and 80 silver (net income of 8 gold 64 silver) Occasional Income: Sector taxes and charges. Department Store-average daily income of approximately 320 gold (net income of approximately 80 gold) Regular Expenditure: Energy Shield Fence – 5 gold per day. Staff Salaries-To be decided appropriately.

Occasional Expenditure: Silver Star maintenance, various supplies paid to staff.

Current Projects: Mt. Fargo restoration work-expenses haven't been settled yet.

Average monthly income.....

The paper contained an in depth report about Dark Eden's financial situation. Surprisingly the monthly income recorded on the form was 1,000 gold!

'This.....'

Galaxian had only started for approximately 6 months. In the meantime he had suffered a lot of from the agent and gain the sector. This was only a guide to his income and it was already beyond expectations. It was income that his character was expected to get. He could gain it even if he just sat back and did nothing. No, Ark had no intention of doing nothing.

'My goal is clear!'

To reach the ultimate goal before Lucifer! That wasn't possible with just an income increase. This was one reason why Ark didn't give up on participating in the investigation team despite his worries. All 3 powers were investigating the existence of antimatter and the magic circle. It was a large scale event so Lucifer's goal might be related to it. And the most profitable way to gain information was to join the investigation team. That's why Ark immediately returned to S-20!

'S-20 will run smoothly now that Hamad and Bain are in charge. I need to focus on preparations to participate in the team.'

"This meeting is finished."

Ark dismissed the meeting and stood up. He still had a lot to do.

—You found it?

The Elim Sanctuary hidden in Mt. Fargo. The floating light sphere called Elim's Memory spoke in an excited voice.

"Yes, the first Divine Artefact was hidden on Rakunka."

-Rakunka!

The light sphere shouted like it suddenly remembered something.

Well, I remember now. Xanax frequently talked about it. He met a brilliant warrior on a planet called Rakunka. I think his name as Asuldan. His civilization wasn't advanced but he became well known as a warrior throughout the galaxy once he gained experience. Xanax often spoke of exploring the galaxy with Asuldan. It isn't surprising that he hid a Divine Artefact in the place where he met Asuldan.

'That bastard.....'

The sphere knew about Rakunka. Yet it didn't say a single word when Ark was trying to find clues about the Divine Artefact. Now it was saying 'Huhuhu, I knew that' after Ark had suffered and recovered the Divine Artefact. He didn't like things like that. But there was a reason he visited the light sphere.

-Yes, what Divine Artefact did you find on Rakunka?

"The Baius Shield."

-Baius Shield! Aha, indeed. The Elim's Heir is still inexperienced so the thing you need most is a defense item. The Baius Shield will be a lot of help to you. The Baius Shield is a strong shield that can also transform into a crystal golem. Ohh, I remember Xanax' spectacular appearance as he battled with the Baius golem by his side. It truly was worthy of being called a Divine Artefact. Ark, can you show me? The great look of the Divine Artefact?

"That's why I wanted to visit you....."

Ark lifted his arm. The lump of crystals around his wrist was the Baius Shield.

"Summon golem!"

The moment Ark raised his voice. There was an explosion as a shield emerged. The shield changed to crystal and fell to the ground. And the shape of a person started to rise. It was the crystal Baius golem! The light sphere exclaimed as soon as it saw the golem.

-W-what? This?

"Can't you see? This is Baius."

-No, but.....the Baius I remembered looked different?

This was the question Ark wanted to ask. Ark had fought the crystal golem on Rakunka. He thought that golem would be summoned so Ark had wanted to dance with joy. A pet was special to Ark. In New World, Ark was able to become

the strongest player thanks to his pets. Of course he had subordinates like the Royal Guards. However a NPC was still a NPC. They couldn't move with Ark all the time or be summoned depending on his needs like pets could. In addition, this pet was a strong golem unlike the skull, bat and snake of New World!

‘Jackpot! If I have the golem then my combat power will double, no triple!’

He had summoned the golem on the way back to Istana from Rakunka with anticipation but.....

Toddle. Toddle. Toddle.

The golem who appeared in front of Ark with some sound effects was tiny. It wasn't even half the size of the golem he fought in the pyramid. Its body wasn't the only small thing.

Baius Golem			
A crystal golem that can be changed when needed.			
Type	Defense	Level	1
Health	100	Defense	20
Attack	10	Special Ability	X

The information window was very simple. It was like comparing poetry from a dog to that of a private school student. Ark grasped the situation the moment he saw the smaller golem.

‘The level starts from the beginning after it changes owners.....’

And he felt despair.

‘Dammit, it was like that. It’s impossible to summon a boss character immediately. This is too much. I’m already level 120. However it only has 100 health and 20 defense? What is this shit? I’d rather sleep cuddling a cotton doll!’

It did have one function that was better than a cotton doll.

–Are you my new master?

The golem was equipped with a language function.

–But abandon any expectation that I will be unconditionally loyal. My self-esteem is wider than the galaxy. If I judge that you’re insufficient as my Master than I won’t offer you perfect loyalty. I’ll be watching from now on.

Toddle, toddle.

The golem started chattering as it stood in front of him. From the time it was summoned, the golem was extremely rude. But it was fortunate that the golem had the language capability. Ark didn’t have any clues for the other Divine Artefacts. Then he could only think of one thing!

“Do you know the locations of the other Divine Artefacts?”

–The answer to that question is NO. I lost my memory when my previous character disappeared and my body was reorganized. Now my existence is being maintained by you. Therefore I have to obey you. But there is something that I remember. Elim’s Memory. That’s the word I remember.

Ark searched through the pyramid and didn’t find another clue to the Divine Artefacts. Then Ark could only think of one thing! The golem had amnesia but it remembered a single thing. Then that must be the clue that Xanax left. That’s why he came to the Elim’s Sanctuary despite being busy.

–I see what you mean.

Then the light sphere started explaining.

–Yes, I remember something after your words. It is like you expected. Xanax often used Baius for another purpose.

“Another purpose?”

–I’ll show you. Baius, come here.

–I don’t want to.

-Eh? W-what?

–My Master is that human. But I have no intention of blindly following that human. So why should I listen to your words? You can come here.

–Y-you brat! Don’t you remember? I’m the Elim’s Memory.

–I don’t remember. I don’t know who you are.

–No, that.....Ark, what’s going on?

The light sphere was confused by the golem’s bad attitude. But the golem didn’t even show good manners to Ark. He couldn’t do anything. Of course, he had no intention of letting the golem behave rudely with him. Ark’s specialty was educating guys like this. He would make sure to teach the golem about the master-slave relationship. But he didn’t have the time at the moment.

“Why are you looking at me? Isn’t this originally its nature?”

–Y-you idiot! The Baius’ source of power is its Master so it also has the same character. The proof is that the previous Baius was a polite and good guy. This thing’s character is 100% because of you!

Dudong!

The golem’s secret was revealed!

‘This guy is rude because it resembles me?’

Ark's mood became a lot dirtier.

–Hey, that's it. I didn't take anything from him. The same type of people will take care of themselves. You take care of it yourself whether you are being boiled or baked. Bring that fellow in front of me.

The light sphere gave up at those words. The sphere ended up moving in front of the golem. A blue light shot from sphere and hit the golem. The light refracted off the crystal body and formed a brilliant pattern on the wall of the sanctuary. It was surprisingly a map of the galaxy! Ark saw something that he hadn't considered.

"T-this is.....?"

–As expected. Xanax liked playing games by making various designs from the light reflecting off the crystal body. But this wasn't the last pattern that I saw. There is no way this design was made by chance. This map is clearly Xanax' message. Perhaps the brightest planets on the map are Xanax' message to you! Hurry Ark! Negative energy has been detected so you must quickly inherit the Elim's legacy!

The light sphere shouted in a voice filled with determination.

<Start of a Great Journey (Occupation only-II)>

You have recovered the Baius left to you by Xanax on Rakunka. This is the first step on your journey to become a true Elim.

It is clear what you have to do in the future. Find the remaining 4 Divine Artefacts. And you have

obtained the clue to the hiding place of the next Divine Artefact. If you find it then you will be one step closer to the Elim's true power.

Difficulty: –

* Currently acquired Divine Artefacts: (1/5)

An occupation related quest had popped up.

“I want to go running off right now but.....”

–You want to? Why can't you? What does that mean? What is more important than looking for the Divine Artefacts? Forget about anything else!

The light sphere started talking angrily after hearing Ark's words. But its attitude immediately changed after hearing about the investigation team.

–Investigating the negative energy? Well, yes. You have to do that. You were chosen by the galactic federation. I also know how much of a threat the negative energy is. Furthermore, weren't you chosen because you are the Elim's Heir? Huhuhu, humans have developed a discerning eye after hundreds of years. Yes, the Elim's Heir is the right person for such a mission. This is your nature. That team is blessed to have the Elim's Heir on it.

Being the Elim's Heir was irrelevant to this mission. Ark was selected due to his power. He had steadily built up intimacy with Marquis Martin and this was the result. But the sphere kept on chattering on with patronizing words.

–You should know this after travelling to Rakunka. You're the Elim's Heir and you can only become an Elim by building up your achievements. Now you've taken your first step by obtaining the Divine Artefact. From now on you have to

always uphold the honour of the Elim. That means you should have the right mindset when making the golem! It shouldn't act like that. Huh? Do you understand? You are no different from an Elim now so you should be aware. Eh? Hey, are you listening?

And it kept on nagging! Ark had felt it before heading to Amara but now the sphere felt like a nagging wife. Fortunately he then heard Jay's voice over the Nymphe.

—Boss-nim, the DNA synthesis is over!

It was the news that Ark had been waiting for.

"I understand. I'll listen to the rest when I come back. I'm really busy at the moment!"

—Eh? What? Hey, you! I haven't finished yet! You can't become the Elim if you can't find the Divine Artefact.....hey, you! Are you ignoring me? I've just awakened after hundreds of years! I'm bored!

This was the sphere's true intention. However Ark had already left the sanctuary.

"Here."

Jay held out a small syringe. If he could return to shortly after arriving back at S-20. Hamad and Asuran arrive and he went to see the Charenjok elder Bakum. The next person Ark visited was Jay. The reason Ark visited Jay was because of an unidentified item from Rakunka.

-Myutal's Cell Tissue (Rare) x2

Item Type: Study Material

The cell tissues from the Myutal that have a very low chance of being obtained. Space monsters often develop special abilities in order to adapt to harsh environments. If the tissue cell of this monster is studied then a variety of information can be obtained. In some cases an unexpected use might be found. However, this requires research skills.

Cell tissues obtained from the Myutal! This wasn't the first time he obtained these items. Sometimes he found them while hunting. But that was the only information Ark could obtain when examining the item. Even using Clairvoyance couldn't find something from the items. No, if there was something then he could only find it with research skills. Furthermore, shops only gave dozens of copper for it so it was classified as japtem. But the rating of the Myutal's cell tissue was rare! In fact, during the 24 hours on Rakunka he had fought thousands of Myutal and only obtained 2 cell tissues.

'There has to be something!'

Ark had a keen sense of smell. He sensed that money was hidden in this item. Furthermore, Ark had an employee with research skills. Jay who had been the head of Charem's research department! It wasn't surprising that an '!' popped over Jay's head when he saw the Myutal's cell tissues. And he ran over to a microscope with an excited expression.

"These are the Adaptation Cells!"

“Eh? Adap.....what?”

“Adaptation Cell. This means a cell that can adapt.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, that....ah, you know the body coating? Body coating is a technique that extracts DNA from alien species and artificially combines it with the human’s DNA. But not all the DNA of alien species can be used. Very few alien DNA are capable of synthesizing with human DNA.”

The galactic federation used the DNA of approximately 30 alien species in body coating. However not everything could be combined with each other. Generally DNA that enhances physical strength can’t bind to DNA that enhances mental strength. The opposite was also true. That’s why body coatings could only specialize in one area. However, very rarely DNA is found that doesn’t apply to this rule. It was the adaptation cell! This DNA could be combined with any type of DNA.

“Wait? Then if you extract the DNA from these cells.....?”

“You can get a body enhancing effect like body coating.”

“What can I you get?”

“I can’t tell the effect unless I look at it directly. Like I said, the principle of body coating uses the DNA of one species to evolve someone to a completely different form. In some cases there is a risk of turning into an ugly alien. But the adaptation cell has a considerable affinity so if that happens then the subject can quickly return to their original appearance. When directly applied to the body, there is a high chance that it will strengthen the body’s abilities.”

“Even if someone has already received a body coating?”

“Yes, it is called Mix-up.”

“Then you? Can you do the Mix-up?”

Ark asked in a look full of anticipation.

“The technology itself isn’t very difficult. You’ve already received a common body coating and the cell is adaptable so special processing isn’t required. Well, a certain amount of knowledge and skill is still required but I’ve experienced it a few times in Charem. The problem is the equipment. This research centre doesn’t have the equipment required to extract DNA. I need a centrifuge and incubator which will cost 2,000 gold.”

“2,000 Gold!”

Ark’s mouth gaped open. But he cooled off as he thought about it. Mix-up could enhance his body’s abilities! Of course the performance wasn’t guaranteed but he could expect at least a slight increase. If the equipment was bought once then it could be used repeatedly. It might he could study more adaptation cells if he found them. Who knows? He had found an unexpected use for cells that only sold for dozens of copper. He couldn’t ignore the potential outcomes. No, there was no need to go there. He had fought thousands of Myutal and only found two adaptation cells. He couldn’t give up this chance to enhance his body. And there was no reason to give it up.

In the past Ark didn’t have a lot of money but that had now changed. Dark Eden now had the structure of a corporation and Ark’s personal funds and company funds were separate. Naturally items bought for the research facility would come from the public funds. The investment into the sector had reduced his burden.

“Okay! Start the research!”

Ark approved the 2,000 gold on the spot. He was leaving for the space frontier and wouldn’t come back for a month. He wanted to confirm the effect

before then so he made Jay hurry with the research. Fortunately he managed to receive the results a few hours before departure. That was the syringe Jay was holding right now!

“This is.....”

“It is the DNA extracted from the adaptation cells that I refined into a solution.”

“If I inject this then Mix-up will begin?”

“Yes, I made this quickly so I’m not sure of the effects. There might be some side effects. Some common side effects include nausea, diarrhoea etc.”

Ark already wasn’t listening. And he wouldn’t change anything even if he heard it. Was he the type to not eat certain pickled foods because he was afraid of maggots? Everything in the world involved a risk whether it was large or small. If he was that scared then he wouldn’t even be able to take a breath. Ark stuck the syringe in him without hesitation.

‘Huk! W-what is this?’

Ark felt breathless. The arm where he injected the fluid felt like lava was spreading along his blood vessels. It felt like every part of his body was literally burning!

“Aaaaack!”

Ark couldn’t endure it and burst out screaming.

-Mix-up has been successful!

The Myutal’s DNA has been successfully combined.
New physical changes have occurred thanks to the

DNA fusion.

<The Myutal's DNA has decrease intelligence by 10.
Instead stamina increases by 30>

-One of your skills has evolved to an advanced level thanks to the Myutal's DNA.

Withdrawal (☆☆) → Hide (☆☆☆)

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆☆☆) has been learnt.

Hide (User, Active): Technique gained from the DNA of a Myutal, a space monster the federation doesn't know about yet. The Myutal has the ability to produce a red substance that covers the land and it can hide its body in the ground. You have acquired the properties of a Myutal and gained the ability to hide your body in the ground. However, if you move while hiding in the ground then you will 100% be detected by the enemy.

<Probability of being detected by an enemy -100%

when hiding in the ground> Mental power
consumption: 50

“I-it is a success! Mix-up!”

Ark cried out as he lifted his sweaty head. It had only taken 1 minute after administering the injection before the information window popped up. He had suffered unimaginable pain in the meantime. However the results were worth it. Ark carefully examined the information window.

‘It decreases intelligence by 10 but.....’

Instead stamina increased by 30. It had the same effect as rising 2 levels. But the best effect of the Mix-up was the evolution of his skills. Hide reduced the probably of being caught when hiding in the ground. A 2 star rated skill had evolved into 3 stars.

‘It is different to Stealth. I can’t move when in the hidden state. But unlike Withdrawal and Stealth, it is possible to hide in the ground. In some cases it could be used as an evasive technique. It isn’t 100% satisfactory but the results are enough.’

“Ah, Ark-nim?”

Then Jay’s voice was heard. Jay was staring at him with wide eyes.

“A-are you alright?”

“Yes, I was hit hard by the injection but I’m okay. The results are satisfactory. I know you had a tough time trying to do it in 3 days so thank you.”

“Ah, no. That’s not.....”

Jay stuttered and pointed to a glass wall. Ark stiffened as he saw the

reflection in the glass. Standing beside Jay was a spider type monster, the Myutal! In other words, Ark had been changed into a Myutal.

“What, what is this? Why?”

“It is probably a small side effect.”

“A side effect? This is a small side effect? I’ve completely turned into a monster! Now what? What do I do now? H-how can I continue in this condition?”

The Myutal grabbed Jay’s collar with one of its legs. Then the door opened and someone entered the library.

“Boss-nim, we’ve gathered on the airfield.....u-unbelievable! Why here?”

The person who entered was Ellain.

Space 4: Are You Ready?

SPACE 4. Are You Ready?

“I’m really sorry.”

Ellain was lying flat on the ground. The person with a shabby form in front of him was Ark. The incident had taken place 1 hour ago. Ark had been transformed into a Myutal as a side effect of Mix-up when he came face to face with Ellain.

“No, it is I. This was an experiment.....”

“Myutal!”

There was no time to explain. The Myutal were Ellain’s enemies! When Ellain witnessed the Myutal (Ark) in front of him he immediately took out his sword. Ellain wasn’t interested in why a Myutal would be in a place like this. The only idea in his head was killing the Myutal. Ark retreated and desperately shouted.

“What are you doing? I’m trying to tell you, I’m Ark!”

“Shut up! How dare you impersonate God’s messenger! I’ll kill you!”

But Ellain was already too irrational. And he unleashed an onslaught of attacks!

“Damn, it can’t be helped. I can only unclog his ear holes! Heir’s Sword!”

In the end Ark was forced to pull out his sword. However there was a problem he didn’t realize until now. Ark grabbed the Heir’s Sword that flew out of his backpack.....tak! Tak! Grab.....tak! Tak!

‘I can’t grasp it!’

Ark had changed into a spider type monster. His limbs had changed into

skewers and he couldn't grasp the sword hilt.

And.....bak!

Ark panicked as Ellain's sword descended towards his head. This was the beginning of Ellain's merciless attacks. But Ark couldn't even wrap his arm around his sword. All Ark could do was roll and run away. Fortunately his physical condition hadn't fallen due to his transformation into the Myutal and he could use any skill unrelated to the sword. And this transformation had a time limit.

"Mind Shield! Welcome to the alter ego! "

He desperately used skills and escaped for 1 hour. Then a fever swept through his body and he returned to his original appearance.

"Ah! M-Messenger-nim? W-what's going on?"

Fortunately Ellain noticed and finally stopped talking.....

"It's not a big deal. I just almost died because of you."

.....Ark was already bloodied. His body was a wreck.

"I'm sorry! Without knowing the circumstances.....I never would've dared raise a sword to God's messenger! Attacking God's messenger is no different from committing a blasphemy against God!"

This was the reason for Ellain lying flat on the ground.

'I think the same.....'

He had been beaten like a dog for 1 hour. It still tingled every time he moved! But right now there was another problem to worry about.

-An adverse side effect of Mix-up has occurred!

There was a genetic conflict when the DNA of a monster was inserted.

A momentary physical change has occurred thanks to this genetic conflict. The process of combining DNA has caused a mutation so this physical change of varying duration will spontaneously occur over the next few days.

‘A few days.....’

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark’s mouth. That’s right. The Myutal’s transformation hadn’t ended. It would randomly occur over the next through days. In other words, he never knew when his body would seize (?) throughout the next few days.

‘There really is a variety of things.’

In fact, it usually wasn’t a big problem. No, it wouldn’t be a problem if it occurred immediately after returning to S-20. But this was already the 3rd day since returning to S-20 and he was preparing to leave for Turan to join with the rest of the team. Yet now this ridiculous side effect occurred.

‘The atmosphere since the beginning of the 2nd investigation team.....’

First there was the advent of Rapid and Valencia. Now there was this improbably side effect from gene synthesis just before departure. He felt an ominous feeling. However he had no choice. He already received the down payment and used it to make preparations for the expedition. And the remaining time was just one day! There was no time to hesitate.

“It doesn’t matter. This is my mistake so don’t worry about it. Has the team gathered?”

“Yes, they’ve all gathered at the roof airfield before I came here.”

“Then they must’ve been waiting quite a while. Let’s go.”

Ark and Ellain rode the elevator up to the roof. He had parked in the sector’s public parking when returning to S-20 because of the Charenjok but originally he had built an airfield on the roof of the administrative office. But the Silver Star wasn’t the only thing waiting on the airfield. There were more than 10 people gathered in front of it. It was the team that would go with Ark to join the investigation team.

“It’s been a long time Ark-nim.”

The first person to greet him was Melina. Ark had realized how important a healer was while fighting the Myutal on Rakunka. Constantly fighting the Myutal made him realize how important it was. And Melina was the only healer he knew. Therefore Melina popped to his mind when picking people to participate in the team. He sent her a mail and fortunately she could make it.

“Thank you for coming.”

“It’s nothing. I didn’t have any other work to do.”

“We’ve come as well!”

“Yes, because we are a set with Melina!”

Then two guys pushed between Ark and Melina. It was Slayer and Leon who had followed Melina from the first time he met her.

‘These guys, they’re still haunting Melina?’

He hadn’t anticipated that Slayer and Leon would follow. However Ark acknowledged that both of them had a certain degree of proficiency. He didn’t

have any reason to refuse. They would also refuse to leave Melina behind. Anyway, he managed to secure a family in one go! There were more people apart from Slayer's group.

"Sheesh, these guys are annoying."

The woman who pouted with dissatisfaction was Kaya.

"What did you say? Do you think I want to see your face?"

"Let's stop it. I'm embarrassed of both of you."

The two men bickering with her was Park and Sadain. In fact, Ark had originally intended to hire the Silver Hand mercenaries. They were NPCs with lots of experience and they were friendly with the Royal Guards so they would be a lot of help. They were mercenaries that Ark had formed a connection with. He sent a mail when returning to S-20 but they hadn't replied yet. He was in a rush so he called Kaya's group who he became friendly with after the chaotic hunting incident. Of course it wasn't for free. This was a long term mission that would take at least a month. They had only been friendly for a fortnight so there was no way they would participate for free. It was the same with Melina's group.

-A deposit of 150 gold. If the mission succeeds then Ark will pay you 5% of the reward.

This was the condition that Ark proposed.

'If possible then I would like to bring helpful users.....'

That's why he gathered Melina's party and Kaya's party for a total of 6 people. He already had to give those 6 people 900 gold and 30% of the success reward. That alone was already a significant bleed. He would also need various expenses when the mission was in progress so the thought of hiring more

mercenaries was taxing. And there was no need for him to hire mercenaries. Ark was the CEO of Dark Eden! He employed 18 people. Of course he couldn't bring all 18 people.

‘Users are more profitable than NPCs for exploring the frontier.’

Kurakan was the only user on his staff so he joined. Considering that this was a survey mission, Hegel's distinct skills were required. And Ark's combat troops consisting of Berad, Cupa, Hedro and Kalliben also participated in this mission. Until now Tori had been steering the Silver Star but he was a NPC so his life couldn't be guaranteed on the frontier. He would remain in the sector to expand the research centre's facilities. Instead Milan would steer while Hegel would manage the engine room. Ellain wasn't a pioneer but he was a combatant unlike Tori. He could take him to dangerous places. In addition, Ellain was determined to accompany God's messenger on this mission. That meant there were 8 employees of Dark Eden! And 6 mercenaries!

Character Information Window			
Name	Ark (R-02788)	Level	120
Species	Human	Occupation	Elim's Heir
Fame	11,730	Adventure	720
Health	3,100 (+275)	Mental Power	200 (+340)
Mana	0	Force	1,825
Strength	300 (+35)	Agility	355 (+51)
Stamina	505 (+55)	Wisdom	40 (+13)

Intelligence	270 (+68)	Luck	55 (+8)
* Title			
Cleaning Foreman (Agility + 3)			
Ignorant Destroyer (Wisdom -10, Strength +7, Stamina +7)			
Beltana's Hero (Strength, Agility, Stamina, Wisdom, Intelligence, Luck +3) Athamas' Hero (Strength, Agility, Stamina, Wisdom, Intelligence, Luck +5)			
Mediator (Wisdom, Intelligence +15)			
* Contribution: Galactic Federation 19,520, Aschulat 500			
* Affiliation: Dark Eden (CEO)			
*Body Coating: Survivor			
+ Environmental adaptation increases by 50% due to the Survivor coating.			
+ The Survivor coating reduces the drop rate of Satiety by 30%.			

+ The Survivor coating will reduce fall damage by 50%.

+The 'Clairvoyance' effect of the Survivor coating is applied.

~~And Ark! There was a total of 15 personnel in the team. Ark checked the information window before looking at the team.~~

"Some of you are seeing each other for the first time but there isn't a lot of time to arrive at Turan. There will be time to greet each other on the voyage so let's board the ship."

Ark's team entered the Silver Star at his words.

"Come on, let's go! The destination is Turan in the Igracia constellation!"

Ark shouted vigorously.

Bakak-!

A sudden crack! He felt a sharp pain as the top of his head was hit.

"Ouch! W-what are you doing?"

"I'm really sorry. It is my unconscious reflex....."

Ellain stuttered with a puzzle expression when Ark turned around. Ark's reflection in his eyes was that of a Myutal.

"Huhuhu! How is it?"

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed wildly. And he pushed a picture under his nose.

"Isn't it amazing? This straight leg and shapely body! Moreover, isn't the face

pretty? The nose and eyes looks just like me! Doesn't an exclamation suddenly come out? This is definitely the looks of a celebrity."

"So....."

Hyun-woo sighed.

"Where are the eyes and the nose?"

"What? Can't you see it? Are your eyes just decorations?"

"I think your eyes are the strange ones."

Hyun-woo looked at Gwon Hwa-rang with astounded eyes. Only the top 1% of Koreans would be able to determine the positions in the photo. No, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that only 0.0001% would be able to see the baby. However Hyun-woo wasn't interested in the baby's looks. There was a large age difference between them and the baby hadn't even been born yet. No, he was more interested in the gender. In the picture the baby was 4 months and it was determined that the baby would be Hyun-woo's sister.

"Can't you see it at all?"

"What about it?"

"Look closely at the strength in the legs and the glare in the eyes. Doesn't she get those legs and eyes from me?"

What marvellous harmony."

"Sheesh, don't talk like that."

"Bah! You're just speechless from her beauty. Huhuhu! It really is amazing the more I see it. How come my daughter is such a beauty? Although it is natural since she is also Park So-mi's daughter. She hasn't been born but I know she is as pretty as Miss Korea. Then wouldn't a Miss Korea come from our family after 20 years?"

Gwon Hwa-rang laughed as he rubbed the picture against his face when he suddenly flinched.

“Uhh! Wait? Doesn’t that mean you’ll get married? N-no! I won’t let a pup steal you away! What if he is a thief or something? No! Yes, I’ll have to mobilize my juniors in the police force to do a thorough background check.....”

“Then you’ll have to prepare for a divorce.”

Park So-mi approached and said. She was Gwon Hwa-rang’s wife, Hyun-woo’s mother and the mother of the future Miss Korea. Gwon Hwa-rang stared at Park So-mi with surprise.

“W-what does that mean? D-divorce proceedings?”

“I don’t want me daughter to grow up with a father who would make his police friends do a background check on her boyfriends. Shouldn’t you use that time to learn how to change diapers?”

His mother sighed and turned to Hyun-woo.

“Would you like a father like that?”

“Let’s see. Maybe a donkey would be better?”

Hyun-woo giggled as Gwon Hwa-rang remained frozen in his spot. Then he peered at his mother’s belly and asked.

“By the way, are you feeling comfortable like this?”

“It isn’t bad. The doctor also said there are no problems. Your father is also taking good care of me. I don’t know about me daughter but he is a good husband for me.”

That couldn’t be doubted. He was a good husband and father. He learned how to change diapers and read a lot of books.....he was a good man. Gwon Hwa-rang looked at Ark and asked.

“Have you finished all your errands?”

“Yes, I haven’t seen you in a long time so have a meal with us.”

“No, there is a place where I have to drop by.”

“What? Where?”

“I have something to do. I have some time today so I’ll see you in the evening. We’ll eat together then. I’ll buy some beef. I know that mother likes beef.”

“You seem to be quite busy these days. I thought you visited the hospital because today was your day off but that wasn’t the case?”

“It’s not like that.”

Then Gwon Hwa-rang opened his mouth and laughed.

“This guy is quite busy these days but it isn’t because of work.”

“What are you saying?”

“Huhuhu! I know everything. Haven’t you been meeting a girl lately?”

“Eh? What does that mean.....?”

“This brat, no need to act shifty. I heard all about it. Didn’t you see her some time ago? We told you to hurry and think of getting married. By the way, I’m quite mad when thinking about it. If you have a girlfriend then shouldn’t you introduce her to your parents first?”

“It’s not like that yet.”

“You never told me you were seeing someone.”

His mother jumped in after hearing Hyun-woo’s words.

“Who? What type of person is she? Her age? How long have you met her?”

“It hasn’t reached that stage yet.”

“Is there such a thing? Didn’t you bring her to hang out with the other rehabilitation members?”

“It couldn’t be helped since the appointments overlapped. Anyway, we’ll take about this some more later. I’m leaving first. I’ll drop by in the evening.”

Hyun-woo avoided the questions and got out of his seat. Not long ago the rehabilitation members had met Irina, or Cho Min-sun. He hadn’t told Gwon Hwa-rang and his mother about her but he wasn’t intending to hide it. Anyway, she met the rehabilitation members so of course he had intended to introduce her to his parents. However their relationship was a little strange after returning from the mountain region.

-I’m sorry.

She sent a letter with only those words. After that they didn’t have any contact.

‘If possible then I would’ve rather called.

Hyun-woo had two reasons why he didn’t call. The first reason was that it was difficult to talk after seeing the ‘Sorry’ message. The second reason was that he joined the 2nd investigation team so he would’ve met her soon anyway. But now the situation was different. Hawk was the leader of the investigation team and set the meeting point in the Igracia constellation. That was a considerable distance from the 1st investigation team that had been dispatched to the Harmadon constellation.

Marquis Martin said that the 1st team had already been exposed to the Rama and Aschulat forces so they would be avoiding contact and proceeding on a separate mission. Their reunion might be indefinitely postponed in Galaxian so he needed to meet Cho Min-sun in reality. But he couldn’t call her now.

‘What now?’

Then Gwon Hwa-rang called. His mother was in her 4th month of pregnancy. She would be at the hospital to check the gender. He had already finished all his preparations to depart to Turan. And it would take 15 hours to reach Turan. Therefore he promised to meet at the hospital today.

‘Yes, that’s it!’

Hyun-woo had seen Cho Min-sun at the hospital. He had seen her sitting in the ICU when he first received news that his mother was pregnant. At that time Hyun-woo already had an interest in Cho Min-sun and learnt that the patient was her mother through a nurse. That was the work Hyun-woo had to do.

‘This is my chance!’

He would be busy once he arrived in Turan. He wanted to try meeting Cho Min-sun before that. Of course it would be difficult to encounter her. The last time had been pure coincidence. Hyun-woo visited the ward where he first saw Cho Min-sun. He opened the door slightly and didn’t see Cho Min-sun.

‘Has she already left?’

“Can you get out of the way please?”

Then a woman’s voice was heard from behind him. Hyun-woo turned his head and stiffened with surprise.

“Hyun-woo ssi?”

The woman approaching from behind Hyun-woo was Cho Min-sun.

‘She’s really here!’

A sigh flowed from Hyun-woo’s mouth. Cho Min-sun had the timing of a ghost. She had contacted him just before his appointment with the rehabilitation members and now she appeared when he was peeking into the hospital room. Hyun-woo couldn’t get a grasp of the situation. And Cho Min-sun

seemed to know what he was thinking.

“.....Let’s move somewhere else.”

So they walked 10 minutes before finding a spot on a lounge. Cho Min-sun was locked in her thoughts and didn’t say anything.

‘Should I make excuses or explain it?’

Hyun-woo was filled with anxiety.

“Why are you here?”

“Huh? N-no.....that is.....”

Hyun-woo sighed as he scrambled to reply.

“I’m sorry I hid it until now. I didn’t mean to hide it. I didn’t get a chance to tell you. To be honest I learnt that your mother was hospitalized. I saw you attending to your mother in the hospital. I accidentally saw it when I came to the hospital the other day with my mother. Today I came to visit my mother so I thought I would see if you were here. Ah, but my mother isn’t sick. She became pregnant a while ago.....”

“Pregnant?”

“Yes, pregnant.”

Hyun-woo scratched his head and hesitated.

“Actually, my father passed away in an accident a few years ago. My mother was hospitalized for a long time thanks to that accident but she remarried a year ago and is now pregnant. Therefore she often goes to the hospital to receive check-ups.”

“I know that Hyun-woo’s father passed away.”

“Huh? How?”

“I’ve seen your autobiography.”

Hyun-woo turned red at her answer. In fact, 90% of the reason why Hyun-woo didn’t reveal his identity in Galaxian was because of his autobiography. When Hyun-woo joined Global Exos as an advisor, Ha Myung-woo came up with a way to promote New World. It was his autobiography! The autobiography was called ‘I succeeded in this way.’ Of course, his character was changed to fit that of a hero so he appeared smug and elite, causing the netizens to ridicule him. Hyun-woo didn’t want to be reminded of that dark history again! He especially didn’t want to hear it from Cho Min-sun.

“Now I understand.”

Then Cho Min-sun opened her mouth again.

“Is that why you seem interested in me?”

“Huh? Those words? What do you mean?”

“You discovered I’m taking care of my mother like your past so you feel some sympathy for me.”

“What do you mean? That I’m interested in you because I pity you?”

“I understand if you did such a thing. But I.....”

“Don’t joke around!”

Hyun-woo jumped up and shouted.

“I didn’t do something like that! Pity? Are you kidding me? I know what it is like to nurse my mother alone! It isn’t pity! No, I also didn’t want pity! But I can still feel compassion! Because I also experienced the same thing as Min-sun ssi! I understand what it is like to be staring down at a mother lying in a hospital bed! But I’m not stupid enough to confuse love with compassion!”

“Please stop.”

“No, I have a little bit more to say.”

Hyun-woo forcefully shook his head and said.

“I knew about your mother a while ago but do you know why I didn’t say it? I was worried that you would misunderstand like now. I’ll speak clearly. I had a good impression of you since the party to help the refugees. And I already liked you when we met after returning to Istana!”

Cho Min-sun was about to say something after Hyun-woo’s words when she flinched and stopped. Her face turned red and she looked embarrassed. She looked away as she blushed. Hyun-woo also turned red as he realized. He had unknowingly confessed.

‘W-what did I say?’

He felt his entire body curl up. Hyun-woo grasped his fist firmly as he felt embarrassed. But the water had already spilled. He had no intention of taking it back now that the words were out there. And he didn’t want to cause a misunderstanding. Hyun-woo had already made such a mistake. He was scared and hesitated for so long that nothing came of it. One such experience was enough!

“And now I like you even more!”

It was a subsequent declaration bomb! No, a confession bomb! But Hyun-woo forgot about something when he confessed. Right now Hyun-woo and Cho Min-sun were in a resting room. The resting room was also full. Hyun-woo and Cho Min-sun belatedly realized that fact too late. The people around burst out laughing and murmuring.

“Ohh! Isn’t this atmosphere nice?”

“It sure is nice that he can explain in such a loud voice.”

“Hey Lady, hurry up and accept. If I keep on watching then my limbs will curl with embarrassment.”

“This is really good. The atmosphere is hot.”

“Eh? That.....”

“Come here!”

Cho Min-sun grabbed Hyun-woo’s hand. And she pulled him out of the resting room with a bright red face. Finally she stopped at a bench in front of the building.

“Sorry, this wasn’t my intention.”

“Heh, you’re saying sorry to a guy who just confessed to you?”

“Huh? “No.....that.....you see.....”

“Is that your answer?”

“That’s not it! I truly appreciate your sincerity!”

Hyun-woo quickly looked around after the loud exclamation. And he spoke in a low whisper.

“Good.”

“Why are you speaking so softly? Just before you were shouting!”

“But Min-sun ssi.....”

“It’s fine.’

Cho Min-sun avoided Hyun-woo’s eyes while talking. Hyun-woo looked at Cho Min-sun’s face. It was autumn and the moderately cool wind blew her hair. Her profile and the nape of her neck revealed by her hair caught his eye. He felt a strange tickling in his heart. It was a feeling he wasn’t familiar with. Hyun-woo eventually sighed and opened his mouth.

“Is it the previous outing?”

“Previous outing?”

“I sent you a message after returning from the Taek Mountain region. I thought about it but couldn’t come up with another answer. But I wanted to check it out directly. I’m sorry.....I don’t want to meet you anymore.....was that the meaning of your message?”

“.....That wasn’t my meaning.”

“It’s not?”

“The message.....it means exactly what I wrote.”

Cho Min-sun sighed and continued.

“It’s because of my father.”

Hyun-woo had thought Cho Min-sun’s mother was a single woman. The nurse the other day said that Cho Min-sun was the only one to visit. That’s why he was surprised to hear her mention her father. But she spoke with a slight flinch.

“My father is rich. He is a tycoon.”

“T-tycoon?”

“That’s nothing to be surprised about. My father has a legal wife. So my mother was his mistress. But I loved my father. My father often came to see my mother and I in a nice car with many servants and I thought he was brilliant. I didn’t know what a mistress was until I was older but that’s not the reason I dislike my father. I hated my father once I became older. My father is a tycoon so he would do whatever it took to raise money.....I only knew afterwards what he was doing. And I came to know my father’s dark side after I met with Hyun-woo on that day.”

“The day you met me? What happened?”

“My father has bought real estate in my name and my mother’s name before. And I learnt this fact after the land was sold.”

“The land? Then perhaps.....”

“It was the real estate in the Taek Mountains.”

Now most of Hyun-woo’s questions could be solved. That’s why she was so interested in talking about the Taek Mountain’s real estate and her dark expression on the way back.

“But why did you send me the letter saying sorry?”

“Didn’t you hear me? The Taek Mountain region.....”

“Yes, Cho Min-sun’s father bought the land and sold it. But it’s not like that is my land. No, even if that was the case it doesn’t have anything to do with Min-sun ssi. So why should Min-sun ssi feel sorry? There is no need for you to say sorry.”

“What does that mean?”

“I told you, I’m Ark. You’ve read my autobiography so you know that I pay everything back with interest. I is the same with the Taek Mountain real estate. I have no intention of withdrawing. If you father is the one behind the real estate problem then I will eat him up. So what reason do you have to feel sorry?”

“My father has a lot of money. He can do quite a bit of damage.”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with you feeling sorry.”

Hyun-woo said with a smile. And he hesitated before carefully asking.

“In the evening.....can I contact you?”

Cho Min-sun sighed at Hyun-woo’s question and nodded. Then she smiled

brightly and replied.

“I’ll be waiting for your call.”

The world was unfair. While someone was in a pink-tinged state of happiness, others were drowning in their sweat and feeling like they were going to die. This was a place where those people were gathered. A dojang (dojo)!

Several prestigious national fencing players had trained in this place. It even had an area for general workers who didn’t train with such intensity. Some people considered martial arts as a hobby. But there were always exceptions from this.

Hwing! Hwing!

One man was wielding his sword alone. The other members started at him while they were resting.

“Who is that friend?”

“Hasn’t he been at it since the time we arrived?”

“His stamina is no joke. And isn’t he unusually skilled in the sword?”

“That’s nothing compared to his old skills.”

A man approached and said.

“Teacher Kim, you know that person?”

“I know. He is my classmate. He was in the kendo club with me in high school and took a bronze medal in the national athletics competition. However he fell into the virtual reality game and started becoming a gamer after he graduated.”

“Game? So he is a pro-gamer?”

“I don’t know. Anyway, we weren’t in contact for a while when he suddenly

contacted me about coming to this gym. Since then he comes and crazily wields his sword without a break for several hours.”

“Why?”

“I don’t understand it but I feel like he is staking his life on the sword. Ha, this really..... I don’t know what his goal is. That guy was rumoured to be quite malicious during his school days.

The instructor stared at the man. That person hadn’t stopped moving for even a moment. He couldn’t stop. Left to right, top to the bottom, he moved his sword like he was attacking and blocking attacks from an empty space. A hateful smile was on his face.

‘.....Ark!’

Drops of sweat ran down the man’s face. The opponent he was staring at was Ark. And the man was called Valencia in another world.

‘I’m ready!’

A light gleamed in the eyes of the sweaty man.

Space 5: Turan the Hawk

SPACE 5. Turan the Hawk

“Heh!”

Ark couldn't stop laughing. The scene of Irina smiling brightly in his head replayed in an infinite loop.

“I'll be waiting for your call, waiting for you call.....your call.....call.....

Irina has kept her promise. He talked to her on the phone in the evening. There wasn't any special talk. Neither Ark nor Irina brought up the subject of the Taek Mountains real estate. They didn't even talk about Ark's confession in the morning. Subjects were things like eating well *etc.* They just talked about the obvious. If it was a conversation with anyone else then he probably would've hung up after 5 minutes. However it was different if the person was someone Ark had feelings for. Several hours had passed before he realized.

“Ah, it is already this time?”

–*Are you tired?*

“That's not it. I'm just worried there will be a burden on the phone bill.”

–*I have an unlimited plan.*

Cheers for the carrier! Cheers for the unlimited plan! He rejoiced after hearing the words unlimited plan. There was no special talk. They repeated a lot of subjects. However Ark was able to learn a lot more about her when talking about such obvious subjects. They had ended the call 3 hours ago and Ark connected to Galaxian after 2 hours of sleep. But he didn't feel tired at all.

‘My energy is overflowing! I have plenty of motivation!’

Adrenaline + dopamine were surging in his brain. A dying person could gain power because of love.

‘Huhuhu! I’m invincible! Now I’m invincible!’

However there were some people who felt threatened by Ark’s new guise.

“H-hey, is that okay?”

“I can’t believe that is Hyung-nim. What happened?”

“He doesn’t look ordinary right now. He is laughing while dripping saliva. Doesn’t it seem like he is going to attack us?”

“D-don’t say that! It is scary!”

Milan and Hegel said while gawking at Ark. They were staring at Ark sitting in the captain’s seat. He was a giant spider monster called the Myutal. Ark would randomly turn into the Myutal as a side effect of the Mix-up. The duration of the Myutal transformation ranged from 10 minutes to 1 hour. Therefore Milan and Hegel kept on tasting death. Milan and Hegel were in charge of the Silver Star while Tori remained in S-20. The captain’s seat was directly behind them so it felt like a monster was threatening them every time Ark changed into a Myutal. The situation this time was much more serious. The warp duration was 15 hours. So the other team members went to the cabins to relax as soon as they left Istana. The only ones on the bridge were Milan, Hegel and the captain Ark. Now Ark had turned into a Myutal and was dripping saliva.

‘Is Hyung-nim sane right now? Is his mind normal when his body is in this state? What if he goes crazy and attacks us?’

‘We can’t be careless!’

Therefore there was an atmosphere of tense suspense in the bridge. But Ark

had no interest in that tension. No, he was unaware that he had even turned into a Myutal. Ark only learned about it after 10 minutes had passed.

“Hah, we still haven’t arrived? Space travel is fairly.....ack!”

Slayer entered while yawning.

“A-Ark? Sheesh that surprised me.”

“Surprised? Why?”

“You’re currently a monster.”

Slayer replied as he released his hand from the greatsword. Shortly after starting the warp travel, Ark had introduced the team members to each other before they entered sleep mode. The team would be together for the next month. So communication between the users was indispensable! Except for Melina, users like Slayer, Leon, Sadain, Park, Kaya and Kurakan were university students. They were all in their mid-20s like Ark. So they agreed to speak informally with each other to be more comfortable.

“I almost involuntarily attacked you.”

“Having one Ellain is enough.”

“Yes, I don’t want to be like him. By the way, I haven’t seen him since the journey started?”

“He is lying in the infirmary. Because he is weak to ships.”

Ellain automatically swung his sword every time Ark turned into a Myutal. However the Kusan’s strongest warrior started vomiting as soon as the Silver Star started flying. After that he started getting treatment in the infirmary. That was actually a good thing. That guy had hit Ark a few times in the head. Thanks to the space motion sickness, Ark couldn’t get hit by him anymore.

“Are we there yet?”

“We’re almost there.”

Ark and Slayer started chatting. Then the team members started gathering on the bridge one by one.

“Good morning! I’m well rested.....oh!”

“Woo! I spend a long time drinking with my friends yesterday.....ack!”

“Eh? Did everybody wake up early? I.....ah!”

They all screamed when they started to greet Ark. Milan who had been looking at the dashboard turned around and shouted.

“We will exit warp space soon!”

“Ohh! At last!”

The 15 hours warp travel had ended. The eyes of the team gathered on the bridge widened with expectation as particles of light swirled and the Silver Star exited the dimensional portal into outer space. A structure with hundreds of lights appeared in front of them. It was a huge metallic structure with multiple layers.

-Turan the Hawk!

The structure was lit up with laser lights that formed words.

‘Turan the Hawk? Then the owner of this hive.....’

Ark was staring blanking at Turan when there was the noise of a communication connection.

-The identification code had been recognized, Captain of the Silver Star Ark who belongs to the galactic federation. Welcome. The Silver Star will be delivered in accordance with the instructions of Sir Hawk. The control code is Turan-10939. Please enter the code and switch your ship to remote control

mode. We will control it from here.

“Hyung-nim.”

Milan turned his head. He started busily moving his hands after Ark nodded. The Silver Star starting moving towards Turan like it was attracted by a magnet.

‘Hah!’

This time a sigh poured out. In fact, Ark was quite excited these days. In the beginning he was just wandering around but then his goal became to form an agent. Then a sector and a ship! Not just anyone could have a sector or a ship. Currently there were only 80 sectors on Istana. However 60% of them were controlled by the 4 large companies. The remaining 40% belonged to users. One of them was S-20. It was Ark’s sector. Of course it was difficult in the beginning due to funding and other problems. But now that he had the support of the Laius company, the sector could reach an intermediate level. Ark had started various profitable businesses so it felt like he was progressing.

‘Now I’m a top ranked user!’

He had no doubt about that when he left S-20. But that belief flew away when he reached Turan. Turan was situation on the outskirts of the Igracia constellation and was similar to the size of the Yeouido area. However it wasn’t a big lump like a galaxy. Turan was a hive, a space station equipped with various state of the art facilities! Ark saw dozens of ships entering and leaving Turan. This huge hive belonged to a user, not a NPC!

‘I heard that Hawk was part of the Seven Swords and one of the strongest users in Galaxian.’

Commoners and tycoons! Commoners and nobles! That was the gap between Ark and Hawk. But Hawk wasn’t the only one who killed Ark’s beliefs.

Ku ku ku ku! Ku ku ku ku!

Shortly after the Silver Star landed. Another ship entered the range of the airfield control tower.

“What? That ship is? Who the hell is riding that ship?”

Ark’s eyes popped out as he witnessed the spaceship. The size of the ship was double the Silver Star! The hull was covered with thick armour like a turtle shell and sharp points attached. To his surprise the man departing from the ship was Mario!

“Mario?”

Mario turned his head after hearing Ark’s voice. He flinched and retreated as he saw Ark who was still in the Myutal state.

“Ah, it’s me Ark. The circumstances.....”

“Ark-nim? Aha! This must be a side effect of Mix-up.”

Mario recognized Ark’s state with just a look. Ark scratched his head with his claws and nodded.

“It’s fortunate that you noticed.”

“Wow! As expected of Ark-nim. Few users even know about Mix-up let alone have the facilities and researchers required to use the technique.”

Ark had realized it some time ago.

“Sometimes players would list biological tissues at cheap price at the auction house. Huhuhu! They don’t realize how good biological tissue is for raising a skill rating. The research skill might seem obsolete in the beginning but it is actually a fraudulent skill. Biological tissue can raise research skill so it can be sold at an unbelievably expensive price. It is also possible to get a DNA sample for Mix-up. Yet users are selling it to the stores or on auction houses for just a few

coppers.”

Ark had also been the same until a short while ago. He hadn't known and had sold dozens of biological tissue to stores! He only recently discovered the uses for it “As expected from Ark-nim who received the Hero title, you are aware of this information even though you are a warrior. You definitely aren't ordinary.”

This brat, making him sick and then giving him medicine.

“Did you prepare the Mix-up solution yourself? I knew it. Merchants who know about it are monopolizing the information so that the biological tissue prices don't go up. Therefore the Mix-up solution hasn't been sold yet. Ark-nim is a warrior yet you directly manufactured the Mix-up yourself. The facilities and researchers required for this is really no joke. Hehehe, please take care of me from now on. By the way, where are Ark-nim's subordinates?”

“Ah, there.”

Ark pointed towards Slayer. Mario looked at them with confusion.

“Eh? Ah, those people?”

“Yes. 6 of them are more friends than subordinates but.....”

“Ah, well, that's right.”

Mario nodded with a slightly embarrassed expression. While Ark was suspicious of his response, a middle aged man approached from behind Mario.

“Mario-nim, all team members have disembarked.”

Ark's mouth gaped open. The man with thick scars on his face was obviously a soldier. He seemed to be a veteran with considerable experience. But the reason Ark was impressed was his equipment. He wore incredibly thick armour like a robot and carried high grade energy pulse weapons. The warrior was obviously more than level 100. The middle aged warrior wasn't the only one. It

was like the soldier had been Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V as 30 similar soldiers lined up. Mario's team truly had the feel of elite warriors. Ark's team members compared to that.....

"Wow! This place is a hive!"

"It is the first time I've seen this.

The space frontier really is different from Istana."

"Don't look around restlessly. You're making me embarrassed."

"This is also your first time entering the universe. Don't try to pretend."

They were looking around like they were from the country. Slayer and Kaya's party were still okay. They might not have experience in the frontier but they were still users who made a name for themselves on Istana. They might be looking around like a person from the country but their equipment and levels weren't inferior to Mario's team. However the Royal Guards were different. Currently the Royal Guards were level 80~90. They weren't low levelled NPCs. But they embraced their CEO's motto of being thrifty and only wore level 50 equipment. In the eyes of others they were only level 50 NPCs. In other words, the users were rustic while the NPCs were shabby. That's why Mario was confused.

"Hahaha, the outward appearance isn't important. It doesn't matter how good the equipment if their skills are useless. Ark is a user who received the Hero title. If you brought these warriors then they certainly must have skill. Isn't that right Turai?"

"Of course."

The guy called Turai nodded. He stepped towards Ark and said.

"I am Turai. I am in charge of Mario's security forces. Ark-nim's reputation is

well known. I hope to receive your guidance in this mission.”

His tone was polite but his eyes were laughing when he looked at Ark’s team. There was no respect! No, it was a look that said he was going to ignore them!

‘Damn, if I knew then I would’ve brought a change of clothing.....’

Just as Ark was thinking this.

“I heard your name was Mario.”

Two people approached Mario and said. Ark reflexively turned and felt immediately ill. The people approaching Mario were Valencia and Rapid. More spaceships seemed to have arrived while they were talking.

“Am I Mario?”

“You were stuck next to Ark when I saw you at the federation headquarters. I’ll tell you something. He isn’t an excellent guy like you think. He only received the title of Beltana’s Hero because of luck. Don’t expect anything from this guy. If you don’t follow my advice then you might be involved in an unfortunate accident.”

“Huh? No, that.....”

Mario studied his face with a confused expression. Then a monster standing in front of Mario approached Valencia and said.

“Eh? That is different from the words I heard the other day? Ark became Beltana’s Hero because he blew up the Rama’s headquarters with the help of his colleagues. In the process some guy tried to intercept all of Ark’s achievements. I heard the name of that person was Valencia. Oh that reminds me, isn’t your name Valencia? Then aren’t you that person? Why are you wandering around spreading malicious gossip?”

“What?”

Valencia's face darkened. He stared at the monster in front of him with confusion.

"What? Who are you?"

"Me? I....."

Then the monster transformed back into Ark. Great timing! Ark sent him a large grin.

"Ark, the one you tried to steal all the achievements from!"

"This bastard!"

Valencia scowled and drew his lightsaber. As expected, Ark reacted badly to Ark! Ark also drew his sword. No, he was about to draw his sword when shadows leaped between them.

Snap! Pajijjik!

Sparks burst in every direction!

"I won't forgive anyone who is rude to God's Messenger!"

The one who blocked Valencia's lightsaber was Ellain, the Kusan's strongest warrior. Valencia frowned at Ellain's appearance.

"What the, who are you?"

"I am a warrior of the Kusan clan, Ellain! God's messenger Ark-nim..... serve.....ugh!"

Ellain stumbled with a sweaty expression. And the next moment!

"G-get out of the way! Blerghhhh!"

His mouth gaped open and he vomited! Ellain still had symptoms of the space motion sickness. Valencia was surprised by the unimaginable attack (?) and retreated but he was too late to avoid the vomit. Valencia's face warped as he

looked at the sticky liquid coating his equipment.

“T-this bastard dares.....I’m going to kill you!”

“Stop!”

A group of people stepped forward. They were wearing uniformed soldiers and were Turan’s guards.

“We won’t tolerate any acts of combat in Turan. If you ignore our warnings and continue to fight then we will take action. You will also be deprived of the qualification to participate in the investigation team.”

“Sir Valencia.”

Rapid who had been standing quietly then said in a low voice. Valencia stepped back at those words.

“You should heed my advice.”

He spat towards Mario before turning around. Mario scratched his head with an annoyed expression and turned to Ark.

“So.....I have to go greet other people. Oh, this is medicine for motion sickness. If that friend eats it then he should feel better in a few days.”

He handed over the medicine to the motion sickness and ran over to other members of the investigation team. He probably didn’t want to be involved for no reason.

“M-Messenger-nim.”

“Eat this and lie down.”

Ark gave Ellain the medicine as he looked at the retreating Valencia and Rapid. They were also meeting other members of the team. They probably intended to warn against Ark like they did with Mario. That way Ark would be

isolated and their plot would succeed more easily. Of course, the current was divided into the military and political faction. But this mission would last for 1 month on the frontier. There was no telling how the relationships would change. They were split into two sides but they weren't forcefully opposed to the other side like the nobles were. Anything could happen depending on their interests and the situation. In this situation Ark was being thoroughly marked from the beginning. It would be difficult for him to get close to the users on the side of the military faction.

‘But.....’

Ark sighed as he looked at the team.

‘Was I thinking too lightly of this mission?’

The users and NPCs in his group were relatively high levelled! Ark thought that this power was enough not to be bullied by anyone. However he could only sigh after seeing all the troops in the area. They were all comparable to Mario's team. Valencia and Rapid were wandering around giving advice and threats to teams of considerable standards. When he thought about it, the 3,000 gold deposit money was meant for such preparations. But the amount of money Ark used to prepare for this was 900 gold. The difference in investment was revealed by the difference in power.

‘No, it isn't merely the difference in investment. My thinking has been too narrow. Istana might be the centre of the federation but it is just the starting point of the game. Even the battlefields on Beltana and Athamas mainly consisted of NPCs. Users are mainly on the space frontier. It is where the high level users of the 3 powers are gathered. In other words, Istana is the minor league while the space frontier is the major league. It means the users and NPCs would be much higher levelled. It is natural that I wasn't included on the game exclusive news TOP 50 ranking.’

He had to swim in deeper waters. Ark painfully realized it with this meeting. And the user who reigned as one of the most powerful 7 users was Hawk! Ark thought up to there.

“Hawk is arriving! Stand in line!”

The guards in the squad quickly took a formation. Suddenly a blue light appeared at the end of the line of soldiers.

‘T-that light? And that hexagonal platform.....’

Chwajijijijik!

Sparks started swirling around the light. At the same time the space distorted and a door formed. Its identity was the Star Gate!

‘Star Gate? Oh my god! It really is a Star Gate!’

So far Ark had only seen Star Gates that moved between cities on Istana and the planets of the federation. But this was a hive on the space frontier. A Star Gate was located a hive that a mere user owned. The scene of a Star Gate on a user-owned hive had a large impact on Ark. Ark had thought of Istana and the space frontier as separate spaces. But there were virtually no restrictions on the distance of the Star Gate. It was subject to some restrictions of course but it could have huge effects when utilized correctly. However Ark was the only one surprised. The other members of the team didn’t show any changes in their expressions.

‘I really was like a frog in a well.’

Meanwhile 10 soldiers walked through the Star Gate. They were the warriors he had seen in federation headquarters 4 days ago. They joined the ranks of guards lining up as a man walked through the gate. The one-eyed man wearing a cloak with a blue skeleton on it was Hawk!

“Everybody, attention! Salute our Lord!”

Cheolkeok, cheolkeok, cheolkeok! Jajang, jajang, jajang!

100 swords and guns soared into the air. Hawk’s appearance as he strode between them was majestic! Hawk entered the front of the square and examined the investigation team members. Then he looked at a warrior near him and asked.

“Harley, are all the members here?”

“Yes, 20 members received the invitation. It has been confirmed that all of them arrived. Each team brought between 15 and 40 people. There are a total of 621 people.”

“Which team brought the fewest members?”

“It is Ark.”

“Ark.....I see.”

Hawk smiled as he looked at Ark’s team. However his face soon returned to its cold expression and he said.

“It must’ve been tough coming here. You have now formally joined the galactic federation’s 2nd investigation team. But I won’t remember your names. Because the name of soon to be dead warriors aren’t worth remembering. If you want me to remember your name then bring results. Your value will be determined depending on the results. Harley.”

Harley pulled out a sphere the size of a fist. He threw it into the square and a light shot up, forming a 3D image. It was a map of the galaxy showing various marked areas in the frontier.

The map had 1 blue marker and 20 red markers scattered around.

“The blue marker is this place, Turan. And the red markers are where the 1st

investigation team indicates that there might be information.”

Hawk explained as he looked at the galaxy map.

“The primary investigation has examined the Harmadon constellation where the circle was created. And a special mineral was found on 5 planets that is believed to be the fuel used for the magic circle. So far that mineral has been identified on a total of 23 planets in the Harmadon constellation. Those planets are these red markers. However, the primary investigation team has been exposed to the Aschulat and Rama so it is difficult for them to explore it directly. That is why we’re gathered in Turan and not joining the 1st investigation team. Your first task is to investigate the planets with the red markers.”

Then a member raised their hand and asked.

“Then where will we start the search from?”

“From where?”

Hawk laughed and replied.

“There are 23 different planets so won’t it take too much time if we search together? We will do it simultaneously. All 23 planets at the same time.”

“You mean the team will be divided?”

“Why else do you think I asked each person to gather their own team? Unlike the 1st investigation team, one person is one team. And the pioneer in charge of the unit is outstanding enough to receive a recommendation from nobles. Am I wrong? Are you someone who needs the help of another person to wipe your nose?”

“No but.....”

The members murmured with dissatisfaction. The investigation team were all

gathered in one place. So of course they thought it was a joint mission. It was the reason why Mario and the other members met in the federation headquarters and Turan. A joint mission was more advantageous. And a certain amount of relationship with the federation could be built. Yet Hawk was splitting them all up.

“You seem to be mistaking something. This isn’t a request but a command. I have been entrusted with the leadership of the investigation team by the Emperor of the galactic federation. Anybody who is dissatisfied can leave at any time.”

Hawk sent the members a cold look.

“And this mission is a type of test. You guys might’ve made a name for yourselves in some areas but I don’t know your skills yet. Therefore I will judge your quality based on the results of this mission. If you want to raise your achievements then you should show a good performance in this mission.”

“How will you decide what planets we explore?”

“Harley, give it to me.”

Hawk turned to Harley and commanded. Then Harley approached with a box with a hole in the top.

“There are 23 memories in this box. It shows the appropriate location. The coordinates and details of the mission on the planet will be included in the memory. The person chooses a memory and will go to that planet to perform the task. The same goes for me as well. You guys will select the 20 planets first and the remaining 3 will be my share. This is a precaution against spies from other powers but you never know.....”

Hawk glanced at the members.

“This is also to prevent wasteful competition.”

Several members looked uncomfortable at those words. Valencia was one of those avoided Hawk’s eyes. A corner of Hawk’s mouth lifted as he saw it.

“Like I said in federation headquarters, I don’t care what nobles think of you. My concern is that the success of this mission will be ruined by disturbed by someone. So just do what I tell you!”

Hawk firmly said. As expected from one of the Seven Swords. Or should he say one of the strongest 7 users? The members in the square froze at Hawk’s intimidating expression.

‘He isn’t my favourite type but.....’

He didn’t like condescending people. No, to be honest they made his stomach hurt. Ark had barely managed to hold on to his sector. Yet Hawk reigned over a hive that had a Star Gate. That wasn’t the only reason why he distrusted Hawk. Ark had felt something suspicious about him the first time they met. But Hawk’s approach was favourable for Ark.

‘The team will be scattered among different planets for the mission. I won’t get help but I don’t need to worry about any interference!’

He had been nervous about the presence of Valencia and Rapid. At least this meant he didn’t need to worry about them for this mission. The same goes for other units. In addition it would be difficult for Ark to gain achievements on a joint mission. But it was difficult when it was an individual mission.

‘Huhuhu! I’ll show everybody. Mario in particular! How dare you look at my team like that? You’ll see soon. And Valencia, Rapid and Hawk. I’ll let you know why I’m Ark!’

Ark’s joy was Valencia’s depression. Valencia frowned as he picked a memory.

Ark also picked a memory from the box Harley held.

“Now, let’s go!”

Ark said as he turned around. Slayer’s group, Kaya’s group and the Royal Guards followed him back to the Silver Star. After a while 20 ships left Turan and scattered in different directions. This was the start of the 2nd investigation team’s mission.

“Is it working properly?”

After all unit ships had left the airfield. Hawk asked as he looked at the partition wall that showed space. Harley manipulated the metal sphere and a galaxy map with 20 points appeared. The 20 points were moving towards a red marker. They were the ships that had just departed.

“Yes, all 20 are functioning normally.”

“Those naive guys.”

Hawk laughed and muttered.

“Although that does make them easier to handle. Then where is Ark?”

“He is on route to O-5440. It is a C-ranked risk planet designated as Impeltus.”

“A C-ranked risk planet is suitable. Send the information out as scheduled.”

Hawk turned his body and said with a pleasant smile. Then Harley said with a cautious expression.

“Is it necessary to do that? In some cases it might cause difficult problems. Even if you don’t like the guy I would rather we.....”

“Didn’t I say it? This is a test.”

“Test.....you mean?”

“Yes, a test. As you said I can step on him at any time. But a fight between pioneers isn’t something that can be won by defeating the opponent once. The true winner is the one who knocks them down at the end. I need to determine the enemy’s ability in order to win such a long fight. And I will determine that with this mission. If he has the skill to be worthy of being my enemy.”

Just as Hawk was saying this.

Roaaaaar!

There was the roar on the airfield as one battleship woke up. Lights turned on as a huge battleship with a giant blue skull carved on it was revealed. This was the battleship of one of the Seven Swords, Hawk’s ship Death Knight!

“Now we will depart. I’ll lose face if my performance isn’t up to standard.”

Hawk said as he turned towards the Death Knight.

Space 6: Impeltus

SPACE 6. Impeltus

“Aha!”

Kaya raised a finger. She smiled and looked at Leon and Slayer.

“I understand. So the two of you are trying to entice Melina?”

“I-Idiot! What the hell are you talking about?”

“We are men who value our relationships! The connection that is formed from the cradle to the grave. That’s the motto of our lives! Melina-nim is like that as well! You know? Do you? So!”

“So what? So you don’t like Melina as a woman?”

“T-that’s.....”

“Kikikiki!”

Kaya laughed wickedly. And she approached Melina before speaking secretly.

“Hey, Melina, do you know? Those guys just said.....”

“Kaack! W-won’t you stop it?”

“Dammit! Stop speaking! This is war!”

“Hmm, is that so?”

“What will you do?”

“Huhuhuhu! Watch carefully.”

Kaya moved her hand to her waist and said.

“I have a free and easy character so you guys didn’t notice. Look! And worship! This beautiful body! This face that shines! This body that can be mistaken as Venus! This charming personality! What do you think? Do you see this dazzling beauty now? You should be thankful that you can talk to a woman like me!”

Slayer and Leon’s lips twisted at the sight.

“.....Heh!”

“What, what the? Are you laughing? These brats! Would you like to try it? How dare you laugh at this perfect body? Hey! Sadain, Park, you guys say something!”

“.....Heh!”

Sadain and Park also laughed.

“These bastards! Are you going to insult a girl with delicate sensibilities? Can’t you react properly? Do you want to die? Do you want me to boil you into dog soup? Huh?”

The delicate girl glared with cold eyes. Then Melina grabbed Kaya’s arm.

“Unni, please stop.”

“Yes, please stop.”

Ark sighed while pressing a hand against his head. It took 15 hours to warp from Istana to Turan. Unlike NPCs that had no other choice, users wouldn’t bother to sit idly on the ship. Therefore the 7 users would place themselves into the sleep capsules and run other errands in reality. But contrary to Ark’s expectations, 6 of them were gathered throughout the cabin.

‘For a youth in their 20s to waste 20 hours just sitting in a game.....’

It was the gloomy reality of gamers in South Korea. Ark felt a bit of sympathy

for them but it was up to the team how they spent their time. They sat in the cabin playing card games like solitaire, making it feel like a MT. They were quite awkward when first meeting on S-20 but Kaya's group and Slayer's group gradually got closer as they neared Turan.

.....The problem was that they got too close. Whenever there was a break they would start chattering noisily. It was to the extent that he couldn't even concentrate on one thought. It was quite unpleasant. In previous games and even in Galaxian, Ark would often travel alone. He developed a clear purpose and judged that an agent was necessary but Ark was generally isolated. He would rather play solo than with a party. But that was only when talking about adventure and combat. Until now he had spent several hours being bored. When thinking about it, the noise wasn't that bad but.....

"Stop it and pay attention. We've arrived at the destination."

Ark pointed towards the window. A giant, purple planet was floating in front of the Silver Star!

※ O-5440 Impeltus ※

A planet belonging to the Hastal constellation in the southern part of the space frontier. While the 1st investigation team were examining planets in the Harmadon constellation, they discovered rare, special minerals.

One of them is a mineral called Burahman. According to the federation database, there are

currently 30 planets that contain the presence of the Burahman ore. Among those, 6 of the planets don't belong to the 3 powers. If 'X' (questions about the magic circle) is related to the Burahman mineral, it is likely to be found on one of these 6 planets.

The unit who receives this memory module will move to Impeltus to investigate 'X'. If they can't find any traces of 'X' then obtain the Burahman ore. The mission will fail if the unit doesn't return to Turan in 2 days.

This was the information in the memory module given by Hawk.

<Dark Omen (Pioneer Quest)>

+ Sub Quest: Formation of the Galactic Federation's Investigation Team → Impeltus Investigation You have joined the investigation team in Turan and received a new mission from the leader Hawk.

The 1st investigation team had found a special mineral called Burahman. Your mission is to investigate Impeltus to find signs of 'X' and the second part is to obtain a sample of Burahman. The

mission period is 2 days. The achievement points will depend on when you return to Turan and your performance.

Once the contract ends, the compensation will be determined based on the ranking of achievement points.

Difficulty: B

The team quest was updated. It took a day to travel from Istana to Turan but Impeltus was a planet on the space frontier as well. It would take thousands of light years even flying at the speed of light. But if he used warp technology then it would only take 1 hour! That's why Slayer and the others started gossiping while travelling there.

"Oh, this is Impeltus?"

"Pretty. It reminds me of a shining, purple jewel.

"We can't be careless. The more pretty something is, the more dangerous it can be. It is like how the beautiful mushrooms are the most poisonous and the pretty girls are dangerous. Just like I'm beautiful and strong."

".....Heh!"

Slayer, Leon, Park and Sadain lifted their lips again at Kaya's words. Kaya puffed with indignation and looked at Ark.

"I agree with Kaya's words."

"Eh? Is that right? As expected from the Boss. Your eyes really are different."

But Kaya's looks weren't the part that Ark agreed with. Ark recognized that Impeltus was dangerous. The flashing lightning that occurred between the swirling purple clouds definitely made Impeltus look dangerous in Ark's eyes. However Ark didn't correct her. She would just become even noisier if he did.

'I don't know whether bringing these guys was good or bad.'

But he had no choice. They were the only people he could gather except for the employees of Dark Eden. And they were reliable when it came to combat. Kaya was flattered by Ark's answer and suddenly asked.

"Now what?"

"What will we do?"

"Don't tell me we're going to blindly search the planet?"

"Of course not."

Ark grinned as he looked at Hegel.

"Hegel, begin."

"Yes Hyung-nim! Optical Scanner!"

Hegel quickly operated the dashboard. The exterior door of the Silver Star opened and dozens of metal spheres came pouring out. They spread out before flying towards Impeltus at tremendous speed. Ark's first adventure with the Silver Star was Rakunka. Ark had learnt many things from that adventure. One of them was that he shouldn't blindly enter a planet without information. If he was more careful then he might not have been shot by the Myutal on Rakunka. And if Xanax hadn't left a mark then he would've been searching blindly for something like a needle in a haystack.

'The core of this mission is investigation! Combat might be involved but the main task is investigation. The first person to gain information about the magic

circle or antimatter will gain the initiative.'

That's why Ark only hired 6 users. He thought it was a joint mission until he arrived on Turan.

'Valencia and Rapid won't dare openly attack my supporters. If a battle starts with the Rama or Aschulat intelligence teams then even 1~2 more people won't be significant. Then it will be better to invest in equipment rather than mercenaries. It is better to use the contract deposit money on equipment that can be used afterwards rather than mercenaries.'

He reached such a conclusion. That's right. Ark used 900 gold to hire the mercenaries which left 2,100 gold. He invested the remaining 2,100 gold. One of them was the optical scanner!

-Optical Scanner (Additional Equipment for a Ship)

Item Type: Investigation Equipment

A compact unit powered by photons that can move within the atmosphere. The optical scanner can sense a variety of energy and the information will be sent back.

Typically an optical scanner is used to survey a planet in the space frontier. In some cases, it can be used to find enemies hiding using Stealth or to track the movement of photon gas.

The scope of the investigation will depend on the

number of search units and the skills of the user. This could be considered an essential equipment for ships adventuring in the frontier.

* Number of Units: 15

He had invested 1,300 gold in this device! It was produced directly by Tori in the research institute so it cost 1,300 gold. An optical scanner sold on the general markets went for 100 gold for one unit. If he had 15 then he would've had to pay 1,500 gold. Tori definitely was useful in various ways. Hegel was the same as well!

“The Optical Scanner has entered Impeltus’ atmosphere. The units have switched to search mode. Search is currently in progress! Ah! Units 13 and 14 have sensed an energy distortion on the north side of Impeltus. An additional 5 units will be deployed to the target spot”

Hegel watched a monitor that was filled with mysterious numbers and graphs. An Optical Scanner unit might be important but it was also necessary to have a person to analyse the data. And Hegel had received high intensity training from Heksu of the Silver Hand!

–Huhuhu! This degree is enough for him to have value.

That was Heksu’s evaluation. It was why this mission included Hegel.

“Ohh! What the? This guy, he isn’t just an alien with a large head.”

Kaya exclaimed while rubbing Hegel’s head.

“Kaya, don’t disturb him!”

Ark yelled with an annoyed expression. Despite Kaya’s interference, Hegel just

continued concentrating without any pauses.

“Hyung-nim, I’ve determined the coordinates. X-342 to 352. Y-20 to 30. The energy distortion is found in a range of 5 kilometres. Given the wavelengths detected, the probability is high that there is an artificial facility there.”

‘Got it!’

Ark’s mouth rose in a smile. According to the information given by Hawk, Impeltus was an uninhabited planet. Burahman was present but it didn’t have a high economic efficiency. That’s why no one extracted the mineral yet. Yet the presence of an artificial facility was confirmed on the planet. If that facility has something to do with ‘X’ or the Burahman ore.....

‘I might be able to get information about X!’

The location was grasped so there was no more reason to hesitate.

“Milan, start the engine! Move towards the coordinates Hegel gave!”

Ark stood up and shouted mightily. At the same time, the Silver Star emitted light and rushed towards Impeltus.

Kurung! Kurung! Ku ku ku ku!

Sharp mountains like awls rose from the ground. The purple clouds swirled around the mountains like a vortex and lightning caused a roaring sound. An echo sounded from the earth like a ghost sobbing. The landscape trembled enough that it seemed like hell. A streamlined silver body entered that landscape.

“We’ve arrived at our destination.”

“Hrmm.....”

Ark looked around from inside the ship with his arms folded. The window showed the landscape of Impeltus. The Silver Star had arrived at the place where the energy distortion had been detected. The range of the energy distortion was 5 kilometres. He couldn't see the artificial facility from the Silver Star. But Ark wasn't disappointed. No, he actually felt motivated. It was detected but it wasn't visible. This meant it was hidden. There was no reason to hide a facility on a planet with no facilities so it meant something was happening here. The probability of obtaining X from the facility had just increased.

"We have to go down directly and search."

"But there is no place to land."

"We don't need to land."

Ark smiled and replied to Slayer's words. Like Slayer said, there was no place to land the Silver Star on Impeltus. The ground of Impeltus was filled with sharp, porcupine like mountains. However Ark had already predicted this situation. So he was prepared. He bought additional attachment equipment.

"Milan, switch to the anti-gravity device and fix the Silver Star to its present location. And operate the descent device!"

"Understood! The descent device is working!"

Milan replied in a loud voice. The doors at the bottom of the Silver Star opened and tol tol, tol tol tol, tol tol tol.....a thick rope started to descend. Slayer who had been watching with expectant eyes turned back to Ark.

"That is the descent device?"

"Yes, it is the descent device. Now there is no hindrance to climbing down."

To be honest, Ark also wanted to install a cooler equipment. However he

wasn't a tycoon and didn't have an infinite amount of money. He had obtained quite a bit of money from the contract and Hamad. But he didn't have time to pour money into a cooler equipment. So he casually answered Slayer like there was no problem. There was a disadvantage to this device.

'It is a little scary.'

Ark swallowed his saliva as he looked down. Currently the Silver Star was approximately 50 metres high. Only one rope was connecting them to the ground. Even Ark was hesitant to climb down the rope from such a soaring height. The same went for the other members of the team. In particular, Melina's face looked extremely pale.

"Me! I will go down first!"

The one who stepped forward was the Kusan's strongest warrior, Ellain! Ellain possessed an extraordinary amount of courage.

"I-I will go down first!"

"No, wait a minute! You....."

"I'm sorry! I won't hold you up anymore! Ugh!"

Although Ark tried to stop him, Ellain threw his body and gripped the rope. He slid down at an incredible speed and started to vomit as soon as he landed on the bottom. This was the reason Ellain jumped down first! The motion sickness medicine that Mario gave him didn't have an effect. But that wasn't Ellain's only problem.

"Heok! Kuaaack! M-my breath! Ugh!"

Ellain stumbled and grabbed his chest. It was an inevitable result. According to Hegel, Impeltus had a high concentration of toxic gases. Of course those toxic gases wouldn't be a problem for someone who received the body coating.

However Ellain was from Rakunka and didn't even know what body coating was! He was Rakunka's strongest warrior but he hadn't received the body coating. Ark had been too busy in the meantime. So he had forgotten about it until they were moving to Turan. That's why Ark was indifferent when Ellain was lying sick in the infirmary. If he left it like this then Ellain would become a ghost of Impeltus. Ellain was a level 150 warrior. Such a warrior would be useful in battle but he couldn't even be used like that.

".....There really is a variety of things."

Ark grabbed the rope and quickly descended. He gave Ellain the life support equipment and clicked his tongue.

"Pay more attention. Yes?"

"I'm really sorry."

Ellain blushed and replied. However Ellain was unexpectedly helpful.

"Okay! I'll go as well!"

"I'm next!"

The team members were impressed by Ellain's courage and started descending with the rope. Sadain, Park and Kaya followed behind Ark. Then it was Kurakan, Berad, Cupa, Hedro, Kalliben, the Royal Guards, Slayer and then Leon. The descent operation proceeded steadily.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!"

Melina looked like she was going to cry when it came to her turn. But she was the only healer in Ark's party.

"It's okay! It's not a big deal!"

"It looks high but you'll reach the bottom immediately!"

“Don’t be in a hurry! Just take it slowly! Melina, fighting!”

Melina closed her eyes and grabbed the rope after hearing the support of her colleagues. She winced, hesitated and gave a little scream every time the rope shook. That was when the problem occurred.

Grrrr! Grrrr!

Suddenly they heard the cries of beasts. Ark turned his head with narrowed eyes and muttered.

“Sheesh, this planet even has monsters? Moreover, so many of them.....”

Ark was looking at a dark valley filled with many red eyes. The ones watching Ark’s group were wolves. Of course they weren’t ordinary wolves. He checked them with Clairvoyance and the name Halrosu. However Ark’s group didn’t panic.

“Damn, this is troublesome. How many are there?”

“It is difficult to identify with all the obstacles. But there seems of be 30 of them.”

“They don’t seem to be attacking immediately. It is difficult to see them because of the surrounding rocks. They have a geographic disadvantage so they’re moving slowly. Kalliben, Leon, slowly secure a sniping position. Cupa and Hedro will cover them while Slayer, Kurakan, Berad, and Ellain will attack from the front with me. Sadain, Park and Kaya, you guys take a side.”

“I understand Hyung-nim.”

“I’ll do that.”

The team members replied and moved to their positions. They were troublesome people who normally joked around. It was also their first time in the space frontier! Slayer and Leon were warriors who Ark had led to victory.

And Kaya's group had demonstrated their superior skills in the chaotic hunting event. The Royal Guards had all graduated from the Silver Hand's hell like training. Their value was shown in battle. Ark and his team members moving into their formations without a sound.

“Why? Why aren't you guys saying anything? Is everybody there? D-did you guys leave me?”

Melina shouted with a quivering voice while hanging from the rope. Then there was the scream of a signal flare.

Kwaaaaang!

“It is starting! Baius Shield!”

The Halrosu exposed their fangs and ran up!

Ark lifted his left arm and ran out. Right before colliding with the Halrosu, crystals started rapidly propagating to form a 1 metre circular shield. It was one of the Elim's Divine Artefacts, the Baius Shield! The canines scratched over the transparent crystal.

“Heir's Sword!”

Ark's sword moved like lightning in his hands. A blue flash shot out and penetrated the neck of the Halrosu.

Keheheheng!

The Halrosu that had been scratching against the Baius shield screamed but several more immediately rushed forward. At the same time Ark's body started spinning.

“Khafra Fencing 3rd style! Galaxy Sword!”

Dozens of swords followed his trajectory! The sword cried out as it spun. Dozens of swords swirled around like a storm! The Halrosu caught in the storm

instantly turned bloody and flew away. Sparkles of brilliant lights sprang out and followed them.

Wiing! Wiing! Wiing!

Blood gushed from the bodies of the Halrosu.

“Wow! How powerful!”

“Doesn’t he seem more powerful than before?”

Leon and Slayer whistled as they watched Ark’s unfolding dance. It was natural. The last time they saw Ark was on the battlefield. Since then Slayer and Leon were busy with the federal TV appearances so they couldn’t meet Ark. Ark’s skills had grown from Amara, S-20 and Rakunka so they couldn’t see his skills. However Slayer and Leon weren’t just surprised at Ark.

“Heroic Spear!”

The spear user Sadain! Sadain skewered any Halrosu that ran up to him. Then Kaya stretched her arms towards the struggled Halrosu.

“Body Vibration! Pop!”

The Halrosu caught by Sadain’s spear was blown to pieces. This was the Esper technique that could manipulate or blow up the enemy’s DNA. But the most amazing sight was Park.

“Come out, Car, Kum!”

Park was the autobot controller! When Park raised his fist and shouted, 2 spheres shot out of his bag. The spheres intricately rotated like a transformer to form the figure of a knight and a dinosaur. Car was the knight type autobot! The dinosaur type autobot was Kum!

“The opponents are those beasts! Step on them!”

Car and Kum rushed at the Halrosu after hearing Park's command. When Car and Kum rushed into a bunch of Halrosu, the area instantly became wet with blood. Car shredded their bodies with a sword while Kum mercilessly trampled and kicked the Halrosu. Slayer's mouth opened as he saw Kaya's group fighting.

"What, what the? Those guys are incredibly strong."

"Damn, they're making us look weak!"

"That's right! We're also people in this game! Show them our strength! Show them our skills! Iron Wall Defense!"

"Ya! You idiot! Iron Wall Defense is a resist technique! Do you think you will look good just before you're holding a shield?"

"Hah, that's right! Ohhhh! Get out of the way! Steel Dash! Haaayaahh! Acceleration Iron!"

"Super Magnetic Shot!"

Tutung! Tutung! Tutung!

Slayer and Leon's strength wasn't inferior to Kaya's group. They were people who played the game for more than 12 hours a day! They followed and raised the level steadily. Therefore they had broken through level 100 a while ago. The Halrosu died the moment they all started firing their skills.

'There is no need to become heated.

Ark looked over the battlefield with a relaxed expression. Slayer and Kaya's group enthusiastically participated in the battle and the Halrosu numbers were quickly dwindling. In fact, he had expected it since the Halrosu appeared. The Halrosu were only level 80 while their group surpassed level 100. There were 30 of them but Ark's group had 12 people down there. They wouldn't be pushed by the large numbers. No, there wasn't any room for the Royal Guards to fight

at all. The power of Slayer and Kaya's group was overwhelming! The Royal Guards could only fire some bullets before the Halrosu died.

"That's okay! You don't have to come out!"

"Yes, shooting will just interfere with our battle."

While Slayer and the others were discussing it on the mountain.

"G-gunfire? What's going on? What is happening on the bottom?"

Melina who had been hanging on the rope for the long time shouted.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At that moment a lightning bolt flew down from the purple clouds towards the Silver Star. Sparks flew everywhere as the Silver Star was shocked and spun wildly. The rope that Melina was hanging on started to swing in accordance with the ship's movements.

"Kyaaaak!"

Melina shrieked. Luckily Milan and Hegel were still in the Silver Star. They were able to centre the Silver Star and stop it from spinning but.....

"Oh no! Melina-nim is gone!"

"Oh my god! She must've fallen from the shock just now!"

Slayer and Leon screamed as they looked up at the rope. Melina's form couldn't be seen at all.

"D-don't tell me she is dead?"

"Dammit! Ark, you should've bought a proper descent device!"

"No! Melina-nim had also descended. She won't die even if she fell from that height. It is highly likely that she is somewhere on this mountain!"

“S-save me!”

Then they heard Melina’s voice. As expected, Melina had slid from the rope and fell to the rocky mountain above them. But the situation became worse before they could sigh with relief. The Halrosu Ark’s group was fighting all turned as they heard Melina’s scream. The distinctive forms of the wolves then started jumping up the rock wall.

“No, those guys are flocking to Melina-nim!”

“No! Melina-nim won’t be able to defeat them alone!”

“Dammit, how can we climb those rocks? And there are a lot of protruding rocks so it will be difficult to climb from this angle! We have to intercept those bastards!”

Slayer had fallen into a state of panic.

“Royal Guards, rescue Melina!”

Ark shouted as he looked at the Royal Guards.

“Hey, do you think it is possible just because you gave a command? For these guys to climb the rocks.....”

Slayer suddenly shut his mouth with a flinch. Berad, Kalliben, Cupa and Hedro had put away their guns at Ark’s command and jumped on the rocks. And leap! They steadily climbed the almost vertical rock wall without a hitch.

“U-unbelievable! How did they.....?”

Slayer stuttered with incredulous eyes as he stared at the Royal Guards. But it was natural. Ark had left a training program with the Silver Hand. One of the tasks was to climb a cliff. Thanks to the Silver Hand, the Royal Guards had to climb a cliff if they wanted to eat a meal. The height of the cliffs exceeded dozens of kilometres! It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the Royal Guards

had already mastered rock climbing. The 90 degrees rock wall couldn't be considered an obstacle to the Royal Guards.

There was even more.

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Kalliben was a sniper while Cupa and Hedro used guns. They showed the effects of this marksmanship while dangling from the rock wall with one hand. The Helrosu jumping off the cliff fell at the Royal Guards' barrage. Meanwhile Berad was steadily climbing and swinging his huge hammer every time he caught up with a Halrosu.

'.....NPCs can also be useful.'

Ark looked at the scene with warm eyes. Once again, NPCs were generally weaker than users. The Silver Hand's train converted the stat points into the desired ones but they still couldn't grow like users. That's why Ark came up with specialization! It was hard for NPCs to keep up with users in a fight. But it was different when the NPC specialized in a specific combat ability. It was why Ark created his awful training program. Moving through a cave infested with bees, swimming through a swamp, climbing cliffs, they were all exercises designed to increase their capacity by 100%. Now this was the results.

'But it's still not there yet. The hell training needs to raise stats that complement their skills. I need to find a way to steadily raise the Royal Guards like users. If I have a chance then I need to make the Royal Guards grow further!'

Ark made a promise to himself. But right now the Royal Guards were enough to shock Slayer.

"Who are they? Was a NPC that helpful in battle?"

“N-no.”

“Then what the hell? What is that?”

Slayer muttered with outrage as he kept on staring at the Royal Guards. Anyway, the situation was recovered thanks to the Royal Guards. The firing of bullets from the members on the rock wall! And the Halrosu who fell from every swing of Berad’s hammer! After 20 minutes Melina could re-join the group with Berad’s help.

“Sob! That was so scary! Unbelievably scary!”

Melina sniffled while facing Ark, who received Leon and Slayer’s glares. Meanwhile Milan and Hegel had climbed down the rope from the Silver Star and joined the party.

“Now just in case.....”

Ark manipulated his Nymph.

-The Silver Star has entered remote control mode.

“Enter stealth mode.”

He hit a button on the Nymph and the Silver Star disappeared. This was the 3rd equipment added to the Silver Star! The remote control mode and stealth capabilities cost 2,000 gold. Ark changed the Silver Star and sent it outside the atmosphere. He didn’t want to risk it being hit by the lightning strikes on Impeltus.

‘Now.....’

Ark mentally summarized the situation as he looked around. He spent 900 gold hiring mercenaries. The Optical Scanner loaded on the Silver Star was 1,000 gold. The remote control and stealth device cost 2,000 gold. He spent

4,100 gold to prepare for this mission. He only received 3,000 gold deposit so he was already losing money. Ark had one reason for investing that type of money!

‘Isn’t this an investment?’

He did this because he had confidence in himself.

Space 7: Secret Laboratory

SPACE 7. Secret Laboratory

Kaekang!

The Halrosu screamed and collapsed. Then a small crystal golem waddled up to the corpse.

-Huhuhuhu! You lowly bastard!

He placed his foot on the wolf and laughed.

–You dare mess with this body. You’re 100 years too early. Blame your ancestors for not evolving beyond dogs. Indeed, you should be honoured that you died by my hands.

“Does that mean anything?”

–How rude! I am the Elim’s Divine Artefact!

“I guess little stones don’t have that much common sense, eh? I am the Elim. And you are the tool that I can use. It’s just like how a stone was used as a hammer in the stone ages.

-I’m not a stone! Crystal!

“Crystal is also a mineral you bonehead.”

Ark declared sharply as he looked at the golem. It was the Baius golem. He had gone through a lot of trouble on Rakunka and finally found the first Divine Artefact. His first impression after finding the Divine Artefact.....well, it was a scam. He had met a huge, strong golem in the pyramid. Ark had to devise an irregular attack consisting of mixing Freezing and Flame bullets! Yet the golem

that Ark obtained was different. It was half of the original size. The ability had fallen by 100 times. Ark hadn't just played one or two games. It was like the RPG games in the 80s where a strong enemy would appear as a colleague with diminished strength. Fortunately there was room for improvement. Usually these NPCs were provided with the character's experience to gain levels. It was the same for Baius. The effort might require him to shave the flesh from his bones but that guy could grow. The golem's growth was also connected with improved performance of the Baius shield.

‘For the moment he isn’t useful when summoned but.....’

It was good to gain a level 1 pet when he was high levelled. The golem absorbed 50% of Ark's experience. And the Halrosu on Impeltus were level 80. Ark was level 120 so the experience didn't have a visible impact but it was a huge value for the golem. Since arriving on Impeltus, the golem lapped up the experience and reached level 12 in a few hours.

Baius Golem			
Type	Defense	Level	12
Health	220	Defense	44
Attack	22	Special Ability	X

His golem's stats had grown! When compared to level 1, it had increased by more than 2 times but.....it was still shabby. The level wasn't enough to attract the Halrosu's attention even when the golem hit it. However there was no need to be disappointed. Ark recalled the days in New World when he was just raising a bat, a skull and a snake. They had steadily grown under Ark's care until he became an aristocratic vampire, a skeleton knight and a dragon. The golem was just stone now but one day it would grow to the giant golem seen in the

pyramid. No, he would grow into a stronger golem. And that wasn't the end of its growth.

-Baius Shield Lv. 2 (Artefact)

Item Type: Energy Shield Wearer Restriction: Elim's Heir

Defense: 250 Durability: ∞

Shield Quantity: 5,500/5,500

The Baius Shield grew along with the golem. The Baius shield's rating had ascended one step when the golem reached level 10. It changed by defense +50 and shield quantity +500! The golem was still useless at level 12 but the shield showed a notable performance just by improving 1 stage. Thanks to that he was satisfied but.....

‘That rude personality isn't fixed even when his level goes up.’

The golem's personality was the problem.

–I'm a person as well! You have to treat me with courtesy!

A stone was suddenly claiming it wasn't a stone.

–You lowly bastards! I am the Elim's Divine Artefact! Our standings are on a completely different level!

He didn't care when it came to himself but he couldn't easily ignore the personalities of other people.

–You aren't a formal Elim yet. Your existence is sustaining me so I have to

obey your commands. But you can only have my body. This doesn't mean you have my heart!

He kept on insisting that his master could only have his body (?). He remembered the Elim's Memories' explanation for the golem's behaviour.

–The golem takes after the Master's personality!

The shocking declaration from the light sphere!

'This personality resembles me? No way! How is he similar to me? He is arrogant and impertinent! He also has no manners!'

Of course Ark couldn't admit it. However Ark was unaware of something. Everybody who met Ark in New World thought of him as arrogant with no manners. Anyway, the golem's nature annoyed Ark tremendously. But he was more difficult to handle than the pets in New World. At that time Ark had used terror to deal with them! If they did something wrong then Ark would educate them by beating them up! This simple method had the best effect. But there was a problem when using this method with the golem. The golem was chunks of stone. His nerves couldn't feel pain at all. It was inefficient so he was forced to use words.

"How do you think you're able to grow like this? It is all due to me. I'm giving you half my experience despite you not helping out in combat. Yet where did you learn to act smugger than everyone else? You should be laying down flat on the ground to thank me!"

-No one ever asked.

Naturally it replied with a rude answer. But Ark wasn't in a position to say anything. Ark had once again turned into a Myutal shortly after arriving on Impeltus. It had been some time but the side effect of Mix-up still remained. And he couldn't grasp his sword when he was a Myutal. Therefore Ark just got

free experience from his team for 1 hour. He shouldn't be talking about topics like sharing experience. The golem was just eating the free experience that Ark obtained. He couldn't make a fuss about the golem taking his experience. Ark hated to admit it but the golem was similar to him. Maybe that's why Ark really disliked the golem's character. There was a saying that the same people would hate each other.

'I need to find some way to fix his bad manners or my head might pop.'

But right now he had no time to waste on the golem.

'By the way.....'

"Messenger-nim, everything has been taken care of."

Ark's forehead wrinkled as he looked around. Ellain spoke from behind him. However he maintained a certain distance.

"What? Am I a contagious person?"

"I'm sorry. I thought I might strike if I inadvertently got close to Messenger-nim....."

Ellain still hadn't adapted to the Myutal Ark. But he had somewhat adapted to the environment on Impeltus thanks to the life support equipment. The proof was that Ellain had turned 3 Halrosu attacking Ark into mincemeat.

"What? This guy, he isn't just someone who vomits?"

"This guy is pretty strong. Where on earth did he find all these NPCs?"

Fortunately Ellain managed to reform his impression in the team members' eyes. He was promoted from a 'vomit man' to someone who could be counted on.

"Hey Ark!"

“This area is also clear.”

Slayer and the others who had been on the opposite side of the valley came back.

“Yes, there wasn’t anything strange. I didn’t see anything like a cave or a machine.”

“I checked it precisely. This is just an ordinary mountain.”

“What about you guys, Hegel and Milan?”

“Nothing apparent.....”

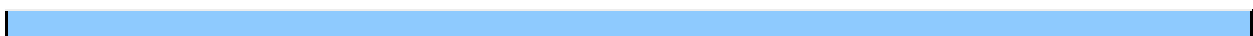
Milan and Hegel also shook their heads. This was why Ark couldn’t afford to pay regard to the golem. Right now they were exploring the area where the optical scanner sensed the energy distortion. According to Hegel’s readings, the probability of an artificial facility being hidden here was high. But they’ve been searching and fighting the Halrosu for 3 hours and couldn’t find anything.

“I couldn’t see anything facility when looking down from the Silver Star so I thought it might be hidden.....”

He thought it might be easily found in a cave. However they couldn’t find any caves within this range. But it wasn’t like Charem’s stealth capabilities. Before descending, he had switched the optical scanner to detect stealth but it didn’t find anything. So they had to run around on foot to search for it but couldn’t find any clue.

‘Slayer, Leon and Sadain are high level users with lots of experience. They wouldn’t just walk past a clue. That is also true for the Royal Guards. If Milan and Hegel worked together then they should’ve found something.’

There was a reason for him to believe that. The Royal Guards were under the influence of the agent buff. The name of this buff was joint business!



-Joint Business I-

This effect is applied to all NPCs bound by the same agent. When employees belonging to the same agent work together on a task, Joint Business creates a synergy between the members' professional skills.

For example, if there is a researcher with no combat skills in the party then their intelligence will spread to the other members. These stats applied to the members could be helpful in battle. However, this effect can only be given and received by NPCs.

500 Adventure Points were originally needed to raise the rating of the agent. But if he paid more Adventure Points then he could select an agent profession skill. This was the reason why Ark paid 1,000 Adventure Points to raise the agent's rating! Joint Business was a system created to compensate for the NPCs' ability being slightly lower than users. It meant various occupational skills could be used more aggressively. All of his staff except for Kurakan were NPCs so it was an essential skill for Dark Eden!

-Current Joint Business effects applied to the NPC staff of Dark Eden

Milan (Treasure Hunter): The party's probability of

finding hidden clues increased by 20%

Hegel (Scavenger): The probability of any monster that the party hunts dropping items has increased by 15%

Ellain (Rapid Sword): Party's attack speed increased by 5%

Berad (Power Type): Party's damage increased by 5%

Kalliben (Sniper): Party's Hit Rate increased by 10%

Cupa (Rifle): Party's ranged damage increased by 5%

Hedro (Rifle): Party's ranged damage increased by 5%

These were the current buffs shared by the Royal Guards. Most of the NPCs in Dark Eden received a body coating so they had the basic tendencies but they didn't have a professional career. But Milan and Hegel had professional jobs. So their shared effects had more of an effect compared to the other staff. Hegel was a Scavenger so he increased the probability that monsters would drop items by 15%. Ark could already see the effect. They had been hunting for the same time but they obtained much more loot than Slayer's group. Well it was just japtem but.....

Anyway, Milan's Joint Business effect increased the probability of finding hidden clues by 20%! That's why Ark had Milan accompany them. He increased the odds of finding something hidden. There was no other skill more appropriate for an investigation mission. Nevertheless! Slayer's group and the Royal Guards hadn't found any clues.

'If only this was a gentle ridge but the mountains here are dense and sharp like awls. Moreover, the range determined by the optical scanner is 5 kilometres. It won't be any use even if Milan and I use dowsing. It would take a few days to explore and there is no guarantee we can find anything. The range needs to be narrower in order to use dowsing.'

Ark scratched his head with the Myutal's sharp legs. Sadain opened up with a pensive expression.

"Isn't it in a cave?"

"But we didn't see anything that looked like a cave."

"No, to be exact we didn't find the entrance. If the cave is underground then there is no guarantee the entrance would be here. The entrance to the cave might be somewhere else."

This was something Ark hadn't considered.

"Yes, that is a likely possibility. But that means the search scope has increased indefinitely. There is a time limit so searching the surrounding area is impossible."

"Then should we look through this area again?"

"That's the only way but....."

Kurung! Kurung! Ku kwa kwa kwa!

While Ark was muttering with a distracted expression. Lightning bolts struck

over and over again from the purple clouds. The lightning had fallen from the purple clouds like a boiling cauldron while they were searching but he still hadn't adjusted to it. Slayer spoke with an uncomfortable expression.

"This planet is really weird."

"It keeps on making my body cower."

"Isn't it dangerous? Don't you remember the scene where the Silver Star was hit by the lightning a while ago? The ship wobbled so what would happen if a person was hit by that? We might be struck by lightning."

"It's lucky that lightning is only falling in one place."

Melina said as she stroked her chest to calm down. Ark felt like he had been hit by a lightning bolt.

"What was that Melina-nim? What did you say just now?"

"Well, I didn't say anything specific. Just that it's lucky the lightning only falls in one place....."

"Only one place? Is that true?"

"Yes, I am very scared of lightning. My head naturally turns every time the lightning strikes. But the lightning only strikes near the area where we first descended."

"The place on the mountain where we descended?"

Ark turned his head at Melina's answer. He felt a heavy pain in the back of his head the moment she confirmed his mental calculations.

"Oh my god! Why didn't I notice until now?"

"What does that mean?"

"That.....no, I need to check it first! Everybody follow me!"

Ark who was a Myutal ran across the ground with sharp legs. After a few moments, Ark's team arrived at the place where they first landed on Impeltus. Ark rushed to the spot he calculated and shouted.

"Shovel!"

The shovel sprang out of his backpack.

Ark grabbed the shovel from his bag and....tak! Tak! Grab.....tak! Tak! The Myutal Ark couldn't grasp the shovel!

"Dammit! Royal Guards, dig!"

"Yes! Shovel!"

The Royal Guards cried out in unison and grabbed their shovels.

"Dig through the mountain!"

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

They shouted at Ark's command and lowered their heads. The Royal Guards had spent one month digging in S-20! Thanks to that, all the members had Dig Lv. 2 while Milan and Ark had Dig Lv. 4! They had reached the stage of mastery. The standard of the member's digging was like a large excavator! There was no difference between rocks and soil when digging.

Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa!

"W-what are they doing? This is?"

"It is outrageous. Even my autobots that had been modified with excavators isn't as fast as that!"

"What the hell were they fed?"

Slayer's group were shocked at the Royal Guards' digging skills. Meanwhile they just continued shovelling. And!

Jjang!

Suddenly there was the sound of iron!

“We’re being blocked! There is a metal wall in front of us!”

“Metal wall?”

“It’s over here as well!”

Slayer’s eyes concentrated on Ark.

“What? Did you know there would be a metal wall here?”

“Of course. Did you think they were just shovelling crazily?”

“No, that digging....they are digging because.....eh? Why are they digging?”

Slayer tilted his head with a stupid expression. Park was locked in thought for a moment before nodding.

“Aha! So it was like that.”

“What? You know something?”

“It is a simple matter. Originally lightning strikes the highest place. But the surrounding mountains are almost the same height. Ark’s subordinates had just dug a hole in a place that is lower than the surrounding mountains. Yet lightning keeps on striking here. Then there is only one answer. Lightning is attracted to metal. That’s why the Silver Star was hit by lightning. It was lower than the mountains but it contained metal. The element attracted lightning. But lightning continued falling here even when the Silver Star disappeared. In other words, that means there is metal here. No, if there is a metal wall then it must be the facility we’re looking for.....”

“A lightning rod.”

Ark mentioned.

“If there are electronic equipment in the facility then lightning is a risk factor. It can influence electronic equipment even when the lightning doesn’t hit directly. Therefore a lightning rod needs to be installed in the facility. It will absorb all the lightning that falls near here. That’s why the lightning only falls in this spot. This entire place is probably acting like a lightning rod.”

“Ohh! Indeed!”

The Royal Guards interjected. Then Slayer looked at them with incredulous eyes.

“What? You guys didn’t know that? You didn’t know yet you were shovelling like crazy?”

“That’s.....Hyung-nim commanded us.....isn’t that right?”

“That’s right.”

The rest of the members nodded at Berad’s answer. Slayer was even more astounded by their answer!

“Okay. Now let’s dig around the walls. The entrance should be somewhere here.”

Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa! Pa pa pa pa!

The digging continued for a long time at Ark’s command. They finally found the entrance of the facility buried in dirt and rocks. The entrance was blocked with a round metal plate like a bomb shelter! A message flashed once they pressed the lever type handle.

-This door is protected with a security device.

Enter the security code or use Invaders to hack and

release the lock.

Attempt to hack? Y/N

Ohu!’

Ark’s eyes shone brightly. This message meant that hacking was possible at his level!

“Milan, remove the connector from my Nymphé and link it to the lock.”

Ark had changed into a Myutal so he couldn’t even remove the connector. But there was no problem for releasing the lock.

-The type of lock is ‘Rhythm Mania: Level 6.’

The DJ located in the bottom is your hacking program ‘Invaders.’ The locking mechanism is the device with the voice signal.

Invaders has to succeed in extracting the voice signal from the lock. The locking mechanism will be released when the speech signal is combined. The targets falling from above are the voice signals. You have to achieve a GOOD rating when matching the timing of the voice signals.

Now put your soul into it!

This mini game was a rhythm action! Unfortunately Ark turned into a Myutal so he couldn't use his fingers. However there were 4 buttons to press and Ark had 7 legs.

Kok kok kok! Kok kok kok! Kok kok kok!

His 7 legs moved like lightning on the Nymphé's screen! Well, he had to strike a pose lying down in order to fully mobilize his 7 legs! He might look like a spider but it wasn't a disadvantage at the moment!

-GOOD!

You have perfectly combined the voice signals and released the lock!

Unlocking!

Ark quickly turned his body over again. He pressed the lever down and the door slowly rotated open. A passage appeared on the other side and an information window flashed.

-You have found <Impeltus' Secret Laboratory>!

++ Dungeon Information: Impeltus' Laboratory ++

You have found a hidden, unidentified facility hidden on Impeltus while performing the investigation team's mission. When the entrance is

opened, the smell of sterile air and fungus is pushed out. It is clear that this place hasn't been touched by people in a long time. But that doesn't mean it has never been touched by the hands of humans. There is the distant sound of machines waking up from sleep! It will be good if they don't see you as trespassers.

* Adventure Points +800

The outskirts of the Igracia constellation.

One spaceship was floating in orbit around a huge, grey planet. All identifiable lights were hidden so only the silhouette of the ship was visible in the shadow of the planet. In the midst of that ship, someone opened their mouth.

"Why are we waiting in a place like this?"

"For contact."

"Contact? By who?"

"Let's see? Who is it? Well, let's assume they're a friend for the moment."

The man sitting in the captain's seat laughed and replied. Then the man who asked the question sighed and shook his head.

"That's a problem. We didn't come here to relax. Did you forget the command received from our home country?"

"I didn't forget."

“You didn’t forget? What do you mean?”

“The reason I’m waiting here doesn’t differ that much from the mission received. No, in a sense it might be even more important.”

“That’s why I’m asking.”

“Keiko-nim!”

Then a soldier sitting down at the cockpit shouted.

“A signal is incoming.”

“Signal? Even our home country doesn’t know.....perhaps?”

“I’ve been waiting for this. Decode the signal received.”

The man sitting in the captain’s seat commanded. The communication soldier operated the dashboard and a message was shown on the monitor.

-O-5440 Impeltus

“Impeltus? That place.....”

Keiko narrowed his eyes and muttered. He turned around like he was about to ask a question before closing his mouth. The man sitting in the captain’s seat seemed to have a flame aura burning around him after seeing the message. The flame aura combined with the red armour gave an illusion of a huge fireball. He said in a low voice.

“That planet is where Ark is.”

The man speaking was wearing red armour. He was given the nickname Red Slaughterer.

“Start the engine! Destination is O-5440, Impeltus!”

The voice resounded on board as the ship in the shadow of the planet woke up.

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

A shriek rang out through the hallway. At the same time a fist cut through the wind. Ark listened and raised his left arm.

“Kuk! Baius Shield!”

Jjang!

Cracks spread like a spider web on the surface of the shield. It had the form of crystals but Baius was still an energy shield. The cracks on the shield disappeared. However that indicated the amount of damage that the shield received.

‘Damn, no matter how weak the shield is to melee attacks.....’

When the shield recovered, it had lost 2,300 energy! This meant that more than one third of the shield’s energy was consumed. At this point it already wasn’t a matter of resistance. The enemy was just too strong. However the power wasn’t the only outrageous thing.

‘I’ve seen it a few times but it really doesn’t fit.’

Ark looked at the monster over the clear shield. The appearance.....it looked like mutilated bodies had been stitched back together into a monster wearing rags. These monsters had appeared in a secret laboratory. The name was Blunder The only thing he could confirm with Clairvoyance was its name. And detailed information wasn’t necessary. He had dealt with a few Blunder so he knew its characteristics. The size didn’t differ significantly from an average person and it didn’t have any special skills. It only attacked by swinging its arms randomly. But it wasn’t a monster that could be easily defeated. The first reason was its level!

‘Level 200?’

Right now Ark was level 120. However the Blunder in the research centre were level 200. It was similar to Ark fighting 1 on 1 with an intermediate boss. And 3~4 of these guys rushed at once. However Ark also wasn’t alone. In fact, this was the second difficult part.

‘Sheesh, its level is high and its body isn’t big!’

The Blunder was a similar size and shape to Ark. Therefore Ark couldn’t be given proper cover fire while facing the Blunder. If they blindly shot then Ark might be hit in the back of the head! But if Ark kept a distance then the Blunder would be exposed to the attacks from the rear support.

‘At any rate I’m quite lucky. I transformed while fighting the Halrosu and now turned back. What would’ve happened if I changed into a Myutal while facing this thing?’

While Ark was busy thinking.....

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

The Blunder once again threw its body and wielded its fist. His Baius shield had already less than half of its energy left! Ark abandoned the idea of blocking and retreated. The Blunder landed and once again rushed towards him. Just as its fist was about to be driven into Ark’s chest!

“Sonic Sword!”

It was hit from the side! The Blunder stumbled and retreated. There was no need to confirm the owner of the sword. Ark raised his thumb in the direction the sword came from and smiled.

“Nice assist!”

“It is thanks to the direct teachings from Messenger-nim. The effect is almost

guaranteed.”

Ellain also gave a thumbs up. Ellain had vomited while sailing on the Silver Star and had to lie down in the infirmary. That’s why he was dubbed the vomit man. He still had the motion sickness even when landing on Impeltus so his skills couldn’t be demonstrated. He also didn’t have a body coating and needed to use life support equipment. However that changed once they entered the research centre. The research centre had an oxygen supply so Ellain could take off the life support system and fight. It was to the extent that he covered for Ark while fighting the Blunder.

“Hey! Watch out!”

“Don’t worry about it! Welcome to alter ego! ”

Ellain turned at Ark’s shout and 5 Ellain’s spread all over the place. Then he swung his swords towards the Blunder’s back.

“Hot Air Sword!”

Flames shot out from the sword! The Blunder screamed as its body shook. As expected from a level 150 warrior! His skills were on a different dimension from the other NPCs. Ellain and Berad were taking care of another Blunder while giving support to Ark. Then the Blunder that had been pushed by Ellain once again approached Ark.

“I can’t look worse than my subordinates.”

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

“Welcome to the alter ego!”

The next moment Ark also split into 5 bodies. While the Blunder’s fist hit blank air, he ran behind its back.

“Of course the President has to be different from his subordinates!”

Wiing! Buuuuong! Wiing! Wiing!

The flash of light continuously hit the Blunder! Ellain had only managed to deal one blow to the Blunder before it turned around but Ark's lightsaber trajectory continuously hit the Blunder. A complex pattern like a tattoo was created over the Blunder. And once the Blunder completely turned around!

"Ink Jet!"

Puaaaah!

A black liquid was sprayed from Ark's head. Ink Jet was the new feature that had been added to the Charenjok's Token through Bakum's sacrifice!

-The Blunder has been blinded!

<The view is blocked so Agility and Hit Rate has fallen for 30 seconds>

The octopus that was stuck to his head restored his head as well as blinded the Blunder.

"Binding Sword!"

It was the onslaught of continuous attacks! A collar formed around the blinded Blunder. Once again, Binding Sword was a technique with an extremely low success rate. The success rate after increased thanks to his repetitive practice but it was still only at 50%. However Ink Jet changed the situation by 180 degrees. Ink Jet caused a state of blindness so the success probability increased by leaps and bounds. Of course this wasn't easy but the combo had a success rate of 90%! It could be called Blinding Chain!

-Your attack has hit the target!

<The enemy's movements will be sealed for 4 seconds!>

The Blunder was completely bound after being blinded.

In addition, he consistently used Binding Sword so it had reached Lv. 2! Thanks to that the duration increased from 3 seconds to 4 seconds. 4 seconds was a long time in a fight. Especially when there was a bunch of people there.

“Now! Focus your fire!”

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Ark turned back and shouted. Dozens of bullets started pouring out in the narrow corridor. Milan and the Royal Guards who had been waiting behind fired their bullets. His presence had been insignificant so far but Kurakan had also accompanied them. Just like Kaya, Slayer and the other members who participated on the team, Kurakan was a name that was quite well known on Istana. So Kurakan thought. He had to properly show his skills to them! But Kurakan had terrible shooting skills. In the meantime he had been bragging about how invincible he was. No, in fact he knew. Kurakan was the type to persistently challenge a user until they got tired of dealing with him and just gave up. When fighting he just blindly fired his machine gun until the opponent died. So it was impossible for him to have any shooting skills.

Still, a machine gun dealt a lot more damage than small firearms. Its attack power and speed were high but the hit rate was only 50%. If it was a quick monster like the Halrosu then he couldn't hit them. So Kurakan thought again.

He became embarrassed at the thought of being buried among the NPCs! However that changed once they entered the research centre. The research centre had narrow passages. If there were no special obstacles in the way then he could just shoot blindly. Especially when Ark had blocked the Blunder's movement with Binding Sword!

"Hahaha! The time has come for me to show my skills! This is the M-620 that launches special ceramic bullets with 20 shots per minute! This is a machine gun!"

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Kurakan held the blazing machine gun with both hands! His gun dealt reckless damage. Thanks to the research centre, Kurakan could become a powerhouse for the first time. Kalliben also aimed for the vital spots while the troopers used their firearms!

-Rune Carving: Kuon has been used.

<All allies within 100 metres will have their health and defense increased by 20% for 30 minutes.>

This was the effort of the Kuon rune! The Blunder lost 30% health in only 4 seconds. Ark also did a series of back attacks! And the shooting of the Royal Guards continued! Shoot! Shoot! In the end the level 200 Blunder couldn't endure anymore. The other Blunder couldn't last either once Ark started helping Ellain and Berad.

-Your level has risen!

That message appeared once they took care of 2 Blunder.

‘Oho! Finally! It is troublesome to take care of but the experience is good.’

He might have a lot of complaints but Ark actually liked the Blunder. Beating a level 200 monster gave him huge amounts of experience. They had caught 30 monsters during the 3 levels spent in the research centre yet he already levelled up. Naturally experience wasn’t the only thing it gave.

“How about it? What did it drop?”

Ark asked into the Nymphe after taking care of the Blunder. The research centre had a small hallway that split into two big ones. The hallway divided to the left and right at the entrance. Ark guessed the difficulty of the research centre so he split the team into two so they could capture both passages at the same time. That’s because there was a time limit of 2 days in this mission. Ark and the Royal Guards were one team while Kaya and Slayer’s group were the other one. Kaya sent a communication and her voice seemed dissatisfied.

-Chet, it came out again this time.

“I’m sorry but what can I do?”

Ark’s lips went up as he spoke.

-Mana Battery Pack

Item Type: For Mana Charging

A battery pack used to increase the mana charging rate of the Rama’s battle suit. If the battery pack is operated then the mana charging speed of the battle

suit will increase. This effect only applies to the Rama's battle suit.

<It will restore 1,000 mana within 30 minutes>

The 'it' that Kaya talked about was this battery pack! The reason for Ark's smirk was because his Rama battle suit used mana. Apart from Melina and Park, the others all had federation battle suits. They recharged on mechanical energy not mana. And the current loot distribution of the party was the occupation had first priority! In other words, people who could use the item had priority. The Blunder didn't only drop mana battery packs. The Blunder also dropped the ether battery packs for the mechanical battle suits.

The ratio was half and half. However the ether battery packs had to be divided between 5 people, including Kurakan, while Ark alone could monopolize the mana battery packs. So he had already gobbled up 4 mana battery packs! The battery pack was worth 10 gold so he had already packed 40 gold.

'I don't know why the Blunder only drops battery packs but.....'

To Ark it was the perfect hunting ground! Of course he wasn't just satisfied with the mana battery packs. This was a hidden laboratory on an abandoned planet so there should be more things he could obtain! These items couldn't be everything.

'Even if there isn't any information on the magic camp or antimatter but there should be some special items hidden in the laboratory! I can smell the scent of a jackpot!'

Motivation gushed within him.

"Now let's go to the next block!"

Ark grinned and walked along the passage.

Space 8: Operations Team

SPACE 8. Operations

[TL]: For those who read the chapter early, I changed the name of the monster to Blunder.

Wiing! Wiiing!

The blue beams quickly crossed the room. Sparks flew as the trajectory of light hit the Blunder and its health dripped out. And the next moment a sword cut its neck. The Blunder grabbed its neck and struggled.

Kuaaaaaaah!

It fell down and died.

“Phew, this place has been put in order as well.”

Ark looked around while holding his sword. It had been several hours since they’ve entered the hallway. Ark’s party steadily moved on while fighting Blunders in every block and occasionally finding items before entering a large room. This place was filled with monsters. It wasn’t surprising that 4 Blunders ran up as they entered the room. However they had experience fighting dozens of Blunders on the way here. Ark’s group used that experience to quickly take care of the Blunders. The work after the battle ended was obvious.

“Milan, Hegel, thoroughly search the room for anything!”

“Yes, Hyung-nim!”

“There are plenty of equipment in the room. The Blunder might also be hiding

in a place we can't see. Kurakan and Berad will keep watch while the others will search inside.

“Don't worry!”

The members replied vigourously and scattered. Ark's gaze turned towards the computers on one side of the room. There were dozens of monitors on the wall and a long desk with computers underneath. This clearly showed the purpose of the room.

‘There's no doubt! This is the laboratory's control room!’

Once again, the reason Ark had come to Impeltus was to find information related to ‘X’. And if he couldn't find anything about ‘X’ then he should obtain a sample of Burahman ore. A secret laboratory was hidden in a place like this. It had been closed for a long time but things were still working.

‘And if this is the control room.....’

Data confirming the identity of the research centre might be left behind. The desk computers had been there for at least 10 years and most were badly damaged. Only 3 worked fine. All 3 turned on when he pressed the switch. A message appeared on the monitor.

-Please enter the password.

As expected, it wouldn't be that easy. He connected the Nympe to the computer.

-This door is protected with a security device.

Enter the security code or use Invaders to hack and

release the lock. The password has a level 8 security rating. Your hacking skill is currently only Lv. 2 and you can only release level 1~6 locks.

<If you don't know the password then try against after raising the level of your hacking skill>

“Hacking is always no use when it is needed.”

It was always a large difference. It was to the extent that he wanted to scream. But who could he blame? He was the one at fault for not diligently hacking. And in such situations the hacking skill wasn't always necessary. Hacking was a 5 star rated skill. That meant it was a hard skill to learn. Of course, Ark wasn't the only one in Galaxian who learnt hacking. There were other NPCs like Tori who could teach the hacking skill but it wasn't common among users.

Information in Galaxian often had security devices attached to them. Not many users knew hacking so they wouldn't be able to obtain such information. The law in a game was that if there was a problem then the answer would be hidden not far away. And Ark had already secured the answer before arriving at the control room.

-Hey Ark, I picked up some papers in a corner of this room. It says something about the control room that I don't understand and a password is recorded underneath. I thought I would send a message to you just in case.

Kaya who had been moving on the opposite side sent him a communication. In fact this was normal. They swept through every corner of the laboratory and found a password. And it was information needed for the control room. This

was the original method to capture the secret laboratory. Hacking was just one of several options that could be used to solve the problem. There was no need to waste time!

*****.

- The password has been confirmed.
- The security device has been released.
- The administrator account has connected to the central database.

“Bingo!”

Ark smiled and muttered. As expected, the message that Kaya sent was the password to the control room computers! Several data items were marked once the database was connected. Among them was an item marked ‘Impeltus’ Laboratory.’

“Shall I check out the identity of this facility?”

He chose the item and a large amount of information appeared on the monitor. The first thing that caught his eye was a map of the laboratory. Ark had noticed it already after spending several hours in this place but the laboratory was basically a tube-like structure. Two passages moved to the left and right in a circular pattern at the entrance but the eventually connected to one central passage.

“It isn’t as big as I thought.”

Most of the time was spent in combat and resting. They spent quite a bit of time exploring the small passage but the central passage was only 200 metres.

“The entrance was the 6 o’clock and we’ll meet Kaya’s group at the 12 o’clock position. And the control room is in the 1 o’clock location. If Kaya’s group progressed at a similar pace then we should’ve investigated 80~90% of the laboratory. Well time is limited so this is suitable for me.....”

Ark’s eyes turned to the letters underneath the map.

-Impeltus’ Secret Laboratory-

A secret laboratory created by the galactic federation’s Operations Team. This main focus was the study and adaptation of the Rama’s Drones to humans. The Rama’s battle suit and its mechanism to increase the body’s abilities will be studied to create battle suits for humans.....

“Operations Team?”

It was a name he had heard before. It was when he had finished the R-14 tutorial and moved to Istana for the first time. The history of the federation was explained to Ark. It was 100 years ago in the mid-23rd century. The galactic federation that had just entered the universe was attacked by the Rama. The Rama were several hundred years more advanced so humanity was on the brink of extinction. Then the Operations Team appeared!

They were led by the genius scientist Lucian and the best scientists of

humanity. Not only did they develop something to adapt to the space environment, the body coating technique was created to that they could exert a level of force equal to the Rama. Humanity stepped away from the brink of destruction and grew to match the Rama and Aschulat.....that was the explanation.

“Then this laboratory is affiliated with the federation?”

Ark made a disappointed expression. If this laboratory belonged to the federation then it wasn't associated with the investigation. However Ark was interested in the reason why the laboratory was established. He didn't know why the federation abandoned this laboratory but.....

‘Battle suit!’

They were researching battle suits here! It was the Rama's battle study they were studying.

‘Maybe I can obtain some useful information related to the Rama battle suit!’

Ark started to earnestly review the data on the computer. And he was able to find some material.

-# Senior Researcher's Report ~01

I participated in the Operations Team led by Lucian decades ago.

After constant research, we found a way to extract DNA from extra-terrestrial life and fuse it with human DNA. The body synthesized the alien genes and

allowed humans to adapt to any environment. This technique was called body coating. However, this body coating technology was limited when dealing with the Rama.

That's because the Rama enhanced their body with the 'battle suit.' The battle suit strengthens the body's capabilities by 100% like body coating. No, it expresses it even more than that. The Rama wearing battle suits can overwhelm humans in all environments.

Thus the next challenge of the Operations Team was to research the Drones that make the Rama's battle suits. In order to develop battle suits for humans.....

-# Senior Researcher's Report ~06

I finally succeeded in making a synthetic Drone battle suit for humans. The root of the Drone battle suit is mana. It allowed a human to absorb and use mana like the Rama. In addition, the battle suits places a significant burden on the human body that it

can't withstand.

Although research suggests that humans enhanced with body coating might be able to endure it. But a problem was found.

Humans weren't capable of fully using the capabilities of the battle suit. The reason seems to be the innate qualities. The Rama have been handling the Drones who were mana creatures since birth so they were perfectly assimilated with mana. Of course, it also depends on the type of body coating that humans select. But the human body was a far distance from being able to fully use mana. The differences in physical characteristics and abilities presented an obstacle to using the battle suit.

While a human could use the battle suit, their basic capabilities weren't as enhanced when the Rama used it. This effect showed a clear difference in practice tests. The researchers embarked on a study to rearrange the genes into a perfect combination to complement for these problems.

'What does this mean?'

Ark's eyes narrowed like a hawk.

'Humans can't exert 100% of the Rama battle suit?'

Ark never had such thoughts until now. No, he had been completely satisfied. He had obtained the battle suit by chance but the performance hadn't varied that much from the federation's battle suit. Well, it was a Rama battle suit so he was uncomfortable using it in front of the federation. But when considering that a battle suit was worth 1,000 gold, he thought it was worth the inconvenience. And he even raised the level of his battle suit last time. Yet now it was saying the Rama battle suit wasn't appropriate for humans?

Of course, the Operations Team had done the research 100 years ago. Circumstances now could be different from back then. But there was something wrong now that he thought about it. The battle suit was a technology that strengthened the body coating ability as well as enhanced his physical capabilities.

'There is a strange part.'

Ark had struggled against users wearing the battle suit. Valencia who represented the galactic federation. The Red Slaughterer who was a Rama. Ark had received a slightly strange feeling then. Valencia and the Red Slaughterer had a surge in damage and skill effect after wearing their battle suits. That's why Ark had a hard time against the Red Slaughterer on Athamas. At the time he thought that their abilities had risen by a similar amount but blamed their different skills.....

'Doesn't the battle suit strengthen skills?'

He hadn't known there was another problem! Other humans from the federation also used a Rama battle suit. They probably also didn't know a penalty was applied. No, Ark hadn't seen the effect of his skills rise so he

definitely received a penalty.

‘Dammit, I thought I got something for free but it was a trap! No, something.....yes, there has to be something. This is what the laboratory was studying. So!’

Ark quickly went through the rest of the papers. He read a few more chapters!

-# Senior Researcher’s Report ~11

A terrible thing happened.

The attempt to perfectly rearrange and combine the human genes with the Drone has failed. There have been some successful cases but that is only 2% of the subjects. The remaining subjects had changed into hideous monsters. The team came to the conclusion that a perfect combination with the Drone genes can’t be created. The DNA from the alien life form is stronger than the human body so humans can’t perfectly use the Drone battle suits.

Fortunately I received a message that the laboratory dedicated to developing battle suits for humans had good results. Human DNA is combined with cultivated alien embryo cells to form a

mechanical type battle suit. It is still in the test phase but one day it will have the power to match the Rama battle suits.

But the federation has already been cornered and can't wait until that time. Even if the success rate is only 2%, if this laboratory becomes known that they will clearly force the experiment and cause numerous victims. So I'm going to join the human battle suit team and will seal this laboratory forever. Along with the victims called Blunder that I produced.

If someone finds the laboratory then I can only hope that someone developed more advanced body coating technology in the future.....

'There is a way!'

His eyes flashed at the contents. This research centre had developed a perfect way to combine human DNA and the Rama's battle suit. Of course, the success rate was only 2%. The remaining 98% had their DNA eroded and turned into terrible monsters. The Blunder were these poor subjects! Ark had killed a lot of these terrifying monsters. It was also why the Blunder dropped incessant amounts of battery packs.

'But that was when body coating technology was just developing. It has been more than 100 years now. And I received the 3rd generation body coating. Like

it was stated in the report, the body coating has advanced many generations!

That meant the probability of success was higher! No, the success probability didn't matter. How could a user turn into a Blunder and wander around forever? If it failed then some penalty would probably be applied. But if it succeeded then his Lv. 2 battle suit could exert 100% of its power. Ark wasn't the type to miss this opportunity. Ark quickly returned to the map and looked it over. There was a large room attached to the laboratory facilities at 12 o'clock.

"Here! The central laboratory!"

Just as Ark was shouting powerfully.

—Ark, a raid!

The Nymphe vibrated and Slayer's voice emerged. The moment Ark raised his head!

Kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

An explosion shook his eardrums. He flinched and turned to the control room entrance that was shrouded in black smoke.

"What's going on?"

"I-I don't know! A grenade suddenly came flying!"

Kurakan coughed and replied from the distance.

"Grenade?"

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Bewilderment spread on Ark's face at the subsequent gunfire. The laboratory had been sealed for 100 years so the only ones present were the genetically engineered Blunder. And there were grenades and guns in the laboratory but the Blunder didn't have the intelligence to deal with them. The only thing he

could think of was a 3rd presence!

‘The federation aren’t the only ones looking for information about the magic circle and antimatter. The Rama and Aschulat are also looking for intelligence. The Aschulat are allies of the galactic federation. Even if the destination accidentally coincided, there is a low probability that they will attack. Then it must be the Rama! No way....did the Rama’s intelligence find out about this laboratory?’

That idea popped into his head. It didn’t matter who the opponent was. They had already started to attack. They were the enemy!

“Royal Guards, gather at the entrance to respond to the enemy!”

Ark ran to the entrance with the members. Kurakan and Kalliben were returning fire on both sides of the entrance. But the hail of bullets from outside was no joke. Dozens of bullets that caused flames were slamming into the metal wall. The soldiers near the entrance were wearing thick black armour, a black helmet and holding a gun and shield. There were at least 20 people!

‘If we wait here then we’ll be trapped!’

Ark’s DNA was trained to grasp battle situations quickly. Ark pulled out his sword and shouted.

“Hegel, smoke bombs!”

“Yes, Hyung-nim!”

Hegel quickly pulled out a few smoke bombs from his bag. The narrow passage was filled with thick smoke! At the same time, Ark ran into the passage while swinging his lightsaber.

“Sword Defense!”

His lightsaber warped the orbit of the bullets with its electromagnetic

influence and the bullets hit the wall and ground. Ark's body ran across the passage.

"Welcome to the alter ego!"

His body divided into 5 parts! The 5 Arks rushed forward like a storm and harassed the enemy.

"This guy is using a strange technique to rush!"

"There's no need to panic! It isn't anything but an illusion! Make a beehive!"

"Join your shields together to make a barrier and concentrate on shooting!"

The gap between shields narrowed while the gun muzzles appeared on top. A continuous shower of bullets! 3 alter egos instantly disappeared as bullets filled the passage. However the Royal Guards weren't just watching.

"Cover Hyung-nim!"

"Waaaaah! Take this! Kurakan's M-620!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa! Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Kurakan jumped out after Ark and blindly fired his machine gun. Cupa and Hedro who were troopers also started shooting! There was a ringing sound as bullets hit the shield before 1 shield warrior started to withdraw from the pressure.

Tutung!

Kalliben then fired his rifle. Kalliben and Beleol were Dark Eden's snipers. And Kalliben was an Unkara so his 3rd eye meant his marksmanship was unparalleled. The bullet shot through a 5 cm gap and hit an enemy's ankle. The enemy stumbled and there was a gap in the shield wall. Ark didn't miss that gap!

“Mind Shield!”

-The Mind Shield has been activated.

<A shield with 362 durability will be created around the body.....>

“Shield Emission!”

He fired another skill before the information window even popped up! The shield surrounding Ark shattered and the fragments blew in all directions. It was a narrow passage so the explosion was like a claymore as the 20 opponents stumbled in unison.

‘I need to inflict a lot of damage in a short amount of time!’

Wiing! Wiiing! Seokeok!

Ark was like a wolf among a flock of sheep. His sword rotated in an infinite trajectory and red blood gushed out afterwards. This was the vulnerability of gun troopers. They had tremendous power when concentrating their shooting but they were helpless once the barrier was surpassed.

‘That’s it! I’ve caught them!’

“Withdraw!”

Then a yell was heard from the front. At the same time, one person flew forward. He was holding a blue lightsaber in his hand!

‘.....A fighter!’

Ark quickly rotated his body while swinging his sword. Then the man bent his

upper body. Sleek and light actions! He wasn't an easy opponent. Ark was just thinking that when the sword aimed at Ark's jaw. It was irregular but the fundamentals of his sword mastery were present! Ark bent backwards as the electromagnetic light swept past the tip of his nose. The lightsaber then started to fall like lightning. Ark quickly regained his balance and raised his sword.

Snap! Chwajijijijik!

Sparks flew as the two lightsabers clashed. He finally saw the man's face because of the light. However a black shield was covering it like the others so his face couldn't be confirmed. He also couldn't see the name with Clairvoyance. They must be wearing the Hyde Helmet that had the function to hide the wearer's identity. That meant these guys needed to hide their identity!

"You, who are you?"

"The enemy!"

The man replied and pushed Ark harder with his sword. It wasn't the answer he desired but he wasn't actually interested. The important thing was that Ark was now surrounded by 20 enemies.

'I wanted to confuse the enemy so that the members could sneak out of the control room but.....'

His attack had been blocked by those guys who appeared. Now the Royal Guards couldn't move from the control room. Partly because of the cover fire from the enemy and partly because they were confused by Ark's sudden rush. Ark had crossed into enemy territory in order to confuse them but now he was surrounded by enemies.

'It will be difficult to confuse them anymore now that my attacks were stopped. If I delay anymore then it will become difficult! I need to withdraw before they regroup!'

He came to the conclusion that there was no more need to hesitate.

“Khafra Fencing 3rd style!”

Ark shouted as he wielded his lightsaber. And the moment Khafra Fencing was about to be activated!

“Go! Galaxian S.....”

Clink!

The lightsaber Ark was holding fell to the ground. Ark looked at his hand with confusion as a situation he hadn't thought possible occurred. His hand was sharp and covered in a hard keratin. At the same time he felt a burning sensation and his eye level started to lower.

“U-unbelievable! N-no!”

Ark burst out with disbelief. He looked like a spider monster. Ark had once again turned into a Myutal. Now when he was surrounded by enemies! Now when he needed to keep them in check! Why now? Ark hurriedly moved his arms despite his confusion but it was difficult to even pick up his sword. Let along fight the crowd! Impossible! Impossible!

“Heh, you still look like that?”

The man holding his sword muttered with a smile.

Ark's head shot up.

‘What? Still? Then this guy has seen me change into a Myutal Before?’

“I went through a lot of preparations to kill you. Yet you're in this disgraceful form. All that sweat I shed in the meantime was wasted. But now you can't use the skills you're so proficient in. Unfortunately it can't be helped.”

“W-wait a minute! Time! Time! Didn't you prepare to kill me? Who are you?”

Do I know you? No, it doesn't matter. Won't you regret it if all your preparation ended like this? So wait a while! This will be released soon! We'll fight then!"

"I won't listen to your words anymore!"

The man replied in a harsh voice and strode closer. He furiously aimed his sword at the shouting Ark. No, the moment it was about to hit! A blue sword suddenly shot up.

"Eh! What is this?"

The man jumped back. The lightsaber had suddenly floated upwards!

'Che! I missed!'

Ark clicked his tongue as he looked at the lightsaber floating in mid-air. This wasn't the first time Ark had changed into a Myutal. The duration differed but Ark had transformed three times after arriving on Impeltus. Normally he had to withdraw to the back. He could only watch the fights. So Ark thought about it. He had to do something. Then the Psychokinesis skill popped into his head. Xanax had stored the skill in the memory of the Elim's Helmet.

'Will Psychokinesis allow me to use a sword in this state?'

At first it was half a joke. So far Ark had just used Psychokinesis to pick up stuff from the ground. He didn't think the power would be able to properly move a sword. However it was surprisingly easy to control the lightsaber with his mind. Of course it was impossible to do fine movements like when held in his hand but he could do simple attacks. The lightsaber had fallen to the ground and he made it fly up with his mind!

"Hahaha! This is swordplay!"

Ark shouted as he energetically lifted his front leg. The sword soared upwards but sharply changing directions. Like Ark said, this was swordplay! He was

controlling the sword!

.....That's what it looked like. The man moved his upper body to avoid Ark's sudden attack and ended up losing his balance. It would be impossible for him to move the descending lightsaber. Just as the lightsaber was about to hit the man!

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

Three shots rang out from behind the man. The lightsaber was struck three times and fell to the ground. The bullet had hit his lightsaber handle and was followed by two more in the exact same spot! Ark stared with surprised eyes at the unimaginable marksmanship.

"It will be a problem if you're careless. You should know the opponent's nature."

A man holding a pistol approached.

'What the hell? That bastard? There isn't just one tough guy but two!'

The man with a sword approached again.

"You dare!"

"Dammit! Eat this! Ink Jet! Ink Jet! Ink Jet!"

Ark jumped and yelled!

Ssik! Ssik! Ssik!

The Charenjok's Token attached to his head continuously spewed ink. It covered the face of the man approaching! And the remaining enemy gathered around! Once they were covered in black ink, Ark immediately turned and ran.

"Kuack! T-that guy! Shoot! Kill him!"

The enemy lifted their guns at the command.

“Ha! You should check your feet first. Psychokinesis! The sword!”

The blue lightsaber shot up from the enemy’s foot! The sword controlled by Psychokinesis spun like a spin top among the enemy. And blood gushed in every direction! The lightsaber flew like a boomerang among the enemies before flying back into Ark’s bag.

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Meanwhile a gunfight was occurring between the enemy troops and the Royal Guards in the control room. Ark’s eight legs worked diligently as he ran past the control room and shouted.

“Now! We’re getting out of here!”

“Understood! Hegel, Milan, block them with grenades!”

Dok. Dok. Dok.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The grenades rolled along the ground and exploded in front of the enemy. A shield barrier was created so it didn’t do a lot of damage. However the enemy were pushed back by the explosion and the Royal Guards managed to break out of the control room to follow Ark. Ark turned the corner and called Slayer while running.

“Slayer, what is the situation over there?”

–Damn, it is crazy! How are these bastards?

“I don’t know! Now what is the situation?”

–There are too many of them. We’re currently in a room but they’ve set up a roadblock in a narrow passage and are shooting at us.

“There are 20~30 people attacking our group. If those guys join up then either

situation will become more difficult. So escape from that place! If you move a little further along the passage then there are multiple small passages. I'll send the members to join you and then set up a line of defense. We'll decide what to do after that!"

—What are you saying? We're not taking a break! We're trapped!

"That's why I'm telling you to escape!"

Ark yelled and broke off the communication. Then he looked at Kurakan and the members before saying.

"Did you hear? Run along this passage and turn left when the path splits in 3 ways and you'll meet up with Slayer. Report back to me after you join Slayer."

"You mean just us?"

"I still have something to do."

Ark said as he headed to another passage. There were the enemies in the control room and the enemy attacking Slayer. That meant there was a minimum of 50~60 people. Ark had also been stopped by the swordsman and gunner. If there was someone similar attacking Slayer then he couldn't ignore the power of these guys. It was the minimum power needed to capture them. There was still the possibility of more people that hadn't been confirmed.

'The power of our team isn't enough to overtake them. There might be additional troops so it would be suicide to fight blindly. There is no place to escape inside the laboratory. It is better to join up with Slayer while these guys were separated and then escape from the laboratory. If we go outside then there is a chance to counterattack and we can get on the Silver Star to escape from Impeltus.'

The problem was that the laboratory was controlled by them. The laboratory

also had equipment to enable a human to use 100% of a Rama battle suit. But there was no guarantee such equipment would be left if the enemy obtained the laboratory. No, there was no guarantee he could come back again.

‘Now! If I don’t do it now then I might not get another chance! When thinking about the usefulness of a battle suit, I can’t lose this opportunity. I have to receive the genetic adjustment even if it means dying!

Of course, he hadn’t registered with the Fairy so the genetic adjustment would likely be cancelled if he died. But even if it was cancelled, he couldn’t give up this chance. He wouldn’t give up until the end! Ark had already decided his course. There was another reason he was going alone.

“Those guys are blocked but not much distance separates us. They might catch up if we stick together. If we join up with Slayer then we will be subjected to their combined attacks. So it is better to disperse their power.”

“Hyung-nim intends to lure them alone?”

“I’m the right person.”

“Then I’ll follow!”

Ellain ran forward with his sword. But Ellain was the one person he couldn’t take. All of the members except for Ellain were pioneers. And they registered with the Fairy before leaving Turan. In other words, if they died here than they could just revive in Turan. That was why a NPC with the immortality of a user would receive the best treatment. However Ellain wasn’t a pioneer. If he died it was the end. GAME OVER! In the worst case scenario, Ark was prepared for death. The only thing Ark wouldn’t risk was losing Ellain. But Ellain considered Ark as God’s Messenger so he would follow Ark to his death! So Ark grabbed Ellain’s shoulder and said.

“I know your heart! And I know that you are a Kusan warrior not afraid of

death! So you can't come with me. I cherish the lives of my colleagues here like Kurakan and Milan more than my own. I am entrusting the lives of my brothers to the Kusan's strongest warrior."

"Hyung-nim!"

"Ugh! I didn't know you thought so much of us!"

Tears fell from the eyes of Kurakan and the Royal Guards. Ellain was also the same. Ark thinking of his brothers touched his heart! He was once again impressed and trusted in Ark even more! He looked at Ark with 2 red eyes shining with respect. Then he nodded.

"I understand! I will finish my job even if my brother is torn apart!"

"Thank you. But you are also a dear colleague of mine. The person you have to take care of the most is yourself!"

"Ugh! To speak such words....."

Ark's sincerity (?) impacted on the Kusan's strongest warrior.

-Ellain's loyalty has increased by 200.

-Berad's loyalty has increased by 200.....

The other members' loyalty also increased! But there was no time to look at it individually. It wasn't the time to be playing around.

"If you understand then hurry! Join Slayer and wait for my orders."

"Understood! Let's go!"

Kurakan and Ellain ran in the front.

‘When considering the various contexts, the probability of genetic adjustment succeeding is high but not 100%. I also don’t know what will happen to genetic adjustment because of the Myutal genes. So far it takes me 30 minutes to 1 hour before I transform. back. I have to attract those guys and buy some time. Then.....’

“Ink Jet!”

Ark fired the Ink Jet again. And he ran in the opposite direction immediately afterwards. The enemy soon gathered there.

“How obvious.”

The man smiled as he looked at the ink marks.

“Is he planning to disperse our power? Indeed, that is the best method right now. Although this obvious attempt.....won’t fool me. Anyway, my goal is Ark. Hey, you! Take soldiers and continue chasing after them. I will take 2 people and follow Ark.”

“No, I’m going with you.”

The gunner shook his head and said. He looked at the gunner for a moment before nodding.

“Yes, your goal was also Ark. Okay. It can’t just be my desire fulfilled. But Ark is my prey. If you don’t follow my orders then there will be trouble.

“I promise.”

“Then you over there, take the remaining soldiers and chase them.”

The soldier who received the order nodded and led the troops. The man took two soldiers and the gunner and started to follow the ink marks.

“That’s why I’m telling you to escape!”

Slayer looked at Kaya after hearing the words and said.

“.....That’s what Ark commanded.”

“Damn, he says it like it is easy. He doesn’t know the situation here.”

Park peeked over the wall and frowned.

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Pepeng! Pepeng!

Hundreds of bullets were relentlessly hitting the wall. Sometimes a grenade was thrown! The enemy had suddenly appeared while Slayer’s group was investigating the laboratory at the end of a narrow corridor. They covered the narrow passage with a shield wall so it wasn’t easy to counterattack. Therefore Slayer’s group had been stuck for 20 minutes.

“Don’t you think it is as easy as Ark said?”

Sadain suddenly replied to Park’s words.

“We heard an explosion on the other end the first time Slayer contacted Ark’s Nymphe. That means they were attacked around the same time. There should be 20~30 there as well. But Ark has already escaped unlike us. We have more troops while Ark only has Kurakan and NPCs.”

“Well that.....”

“Aren’t we strong users?”

Sadain spoke in a low voice while raising his body. He placed the spear on his shoulder and smiled as he spoke.

“I’m going now. I might be hit with bullets but hiding in a place like this doesn’t agree with me. Above all, I don’t want to hear that we’re worse than

NPCs.”

“I agree.”

Kaya and Park also nodded and rose.

“We can’t sit here forever.”

“That’s right. Then shall we loosen our bodies a bit? Leon. Melina-nim.”

“Yes, leave the healing to me!”

Slayer, Leon and Melina also vigorously nodded. Then one soldier among the group at the barricade lifted a hand grenade. Kaya noticed it and stretched her arms out towards the door.

“DNA transformation! Become a dog!”

“Huk! What, what the? My hair and body, why.....Bark! Bark!”

The soldier about to throw a grenade had turned into a dog. At the same time the grenade fell to the ground!

“Heok! Y-you stupid bastard! The damage!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

An explosion occurred behind the shield barrier. Then the enemies started aiming their machine guns at Kaya. Hundreds of bullets burst from the machine guns and were about to hit Kaya’s body!

“Iron Wall Defense!”

Ting! Ting! Ting!

Slayer stopped it with his steel shield!

“Dammit! Troopers! Blow them up at once with RPGs!”

“You fools, do you think we will just wait and let you shoot us?”

Tutung! Tutung! Tutung!

A blue light hit the muzzle. It was Leon's rail gun! The bullets were accelerated with electronic power so it quickly crossed the place into a trooper's forehead. The trooper stiffened and collapsed to the ground.

"Now! Kum, defense mode and charge! Car, after Kum!"

At the same time, 2 autobots rushed into the hallway. And the next moment!

"Yes, we can do it. Armour armament!"

The one rushing towards the enemy troops was Sadain! A metal sphere rose from his bag, rotated complicatedly and unfolded. The metal sphere opened into a battle suit! The battle suit wrapped around Sadain's body as his sphere fell towards enemy lines.

"I'm armed. Lightning Spear!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa! Pajijiji!

Sparks flew up as there was a roaring sound.

"It is the same here."

Hundreds of meters from that passage. A man in a black helmet inspected the thick smoke and muttered.

"This isn't simply a smoke screen to hide his appearance. It also prevents us from looking at the surrounding terrain. And we are going round in circles."

The man laughed.

"You seem to be enjoying his reactions."

The gunner stated calmly

"Isn't it interesting? This is still a game. And a game is for fun. One way to

enjoy a game is revenge. Simply killing him is too impractical. Shouldn't you enjoy the process as much as possible?"

"How ridiculous."

The gunner retorted.

"Revenge is revenge. The results aren't important. But I agree with one thing. Simply killing him is too impractical. It is important to kill but it is also important to think of 'I, myself.' We'll talk after we catch him."

Then he looked back at the waiting soldiers and commanded.

"The crossroad in the passage only has 3 options. So we will each take one passage and narrow the encirclement. You saw it, he is strong. Now he is a spider monster because of the Mix-up side effect but he is still cunning. In addition, the side-up might be released by the time we find him so be prepared to fight. If you find him then report to me."

"Understood!"

The soldiers replied and ran forward. The gunner also moved through a passage. 20 minutes after breaking through the smoke screen and slowly encircling Ark.

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

Shots were heard from a place not far away.

'That is the sound of his pistol! Did he meet Ark first? Sheesh, I guess I better hurry.'

The man bit his lips and started to dash through the smoke screen. Suddenly his eyes noticed a hazy shape within the smoke. And gunshots were heard from behind! Confidence started to form in the man's eyes.

'.....That guy!'

“Peyital Blade!”

The sword shone in his hand.

Space 9: Raiders!

SPACE 9. Raiders!

Pajik!

There was a sharp sound and a crack spread on the crystal at his wrist. The message window flashed in front of Ark.

-The Baius Golem has been attacked by the enemy and destroyed!

<The Baius Golem has taken a hit over its limit and is using the energy of the shield for self-recovery.

Therefore the shield won't work for the 24 hours required to completely revive the golem>

'Sheesh that Bao brat, he's gone already?'

Ark frowned with irritation. The room Ark was currently in was filled with various research equipment. He was inside a glass tube that occupied the centre of the room. The clear glass tube was filled with a yellow liquid that had air bubbles rising to the top. This glass tube was the gene sync system! It was the equipment to activate human genes that could work with the Drones.

In fact, it had been 20 minutes since Ark separated from the Royal Guards and he had already changed back from a Myutal. And he stored the map he found in

the control room so it wasn't a problem to visit the Central Laboratory. But there was a risk of detection from the guys chasing him if he went directly to the Central Laboratory.

'Then this guy!'

The ridiculous Baius Golem had emerged! He abbreviated it to Bao. However his combat level was still low so it was impossible for the golem to take care of them. He filled a narrow passage with Ink Jet and smoke bombs then gave orders to Bao.

"Run Bao! Round and round! Go around without stopping! Round and round!"

He flew around the complicated passages while filling it with smoke bombs. After the pursuers followed the ink marks left behind by Bao, Ark managed to sneak to the Central Laboratory. And he just received news that Bao had been killed in battle. However Ark had no intention of showing sorrow.

'Dammit, so fast!'

There was a part Ark hadn't considered. Once he selected the Slayer boating coating, the process was completed immediately. And according to the researcher's report, the gene rearrangement was based on body coating technology. Ark thought he could finish it as soon as he arrived at the Central Laboratory and then would join up with his team. Ark hadn't considered that the technology was created more than 100 years ago!

Body coating was just created then. Rearranging genes used that body coating technology. It was impossible for the technology to stand up to the one used to give Ark his 3rd generation body coating. This process would take 30 minutes! Bao had only lasted 5 minutes!

-Your genes will be rearranged to synchronize with

the Drones.

<Time remaining: 24 mins 45 secs.....24 mins 30
secs.....>

There was still 25 minutes left until completion.

‘Bao is dead and the path to the Central Laboratory isn’t that complex. And Slayer’s group is fighting the enemies on the other side of the central passage. If they start searching then it won’t be difficult to find this laboratory. If they travel in a straight line then it will just take 2~3 minutes. Now I have to believe in those guys out there?’

Ark had used Stealth mode to move to the Central Laboratory. It wasn’t because of the enemies. Ark’s former enemies the Blunder had showed up. Those guys were close to the Central Laboratory so Ark avoided them using Stealth. Now he had to rely on them to stop the chasers.

Tong! Kang! Peng!

Then a lot of noise was heard from a distance. Ark narrowed his eyes from inside the glass tube.

‘They came! Those guys have started to move here!’

The noise he heard was the chasers competing with the Blunder. Currently Ark couldn’t move until the process was complete. If they arrived before it finished then it was GAME OVER. Therefore Ark was praying that the Blunder would hold up the chasers for as long as possible.

Tong! Kang! Peng!

‘Hold! Exert yourselves! You guys can do it!’

And he cheered on the Blunder.

Tong! Kang! Peng!

‘Damn, why are they so fast? Have they come already?’

He trembled anxiously as he heard signs of them approaching.

Tong! Kang! Peng!

‘Eh? What? These bastards! The battle just ended and they’re moving on already? Are they using potions? Drugs? A young person shouldn’t rely on drugs! Don’t throw away your body! You should rest slowly!’

He sometimes worried (?) about the bodies of the pursuers.

<Time remaining: 1 min.....59 secs.....58 secs.....>

‘That’s it! There’s only 1 minute left!’

Ark clenched his fist together. The noise on the other side of the door seemed to stop for a while.....

Pepeng! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a ringing sound and the tempered glass of the laboratory door shattered. Four people entered the laboratory through the scattered glass.

‘Oh my god! They’re here!’

“Ark, I finally found you!”

The one in the lead was the man wearing a black helmet and holding a sword! The gunner followed him along with two soldiers holding a machine gun and RPG. Their eyes surveyed the laboratory for a while before reaching the glass tube in the centre. They were puzzled at the sight of Ark floating in the yellow

liquid.

“I don’t know what you’re doing but this is the end. Come out Ark!”

‘Damn! Do you think I would stay in here if I could get out?’

“If you don’t come out.....”

The swordsman turned his head and slightly lifted his arm. The black helmeted soldier standing in the doorway lifted a RPG. Ark hurriedly waved his arms. And he started to twist his body.

‘Wait a minute! This bastard, didn’t you want to fight me? Okay! I’ll do it! But I’m slightly stuck now. So please wait a moment! You must have a busy mind. Sit there and rest a little bit. You can go to the bathroom if needed. Or maybe smoke a cigarette? You trained for a fight so it would be a shame to end it like this. Only 1 minute! Wait 1 minute!’

That was the meaning of his body language. However.....

“Are you playing with me?”

.....It didn’t work. That guy wouldn’t wait patiently just because Ark told him so.

“If you don’t come out then I’ll be forced to pull you out.”

The swordsman muttered with a cold voice and the soldier with the RPG stepped forward. And he pulled the trigger towards the glass tube!

Kwa kwang! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Flames soared and the glass tube crumbled.

“Slayer-nim!”

A yell was heard from the hallway beyond them. 10 people came running

towards Slayer. It was Kurakan, Ellain and the employees of Dark Eden.

“You’re safe.”

“Heh, this much is nothing.”

Slayer smiled and replied. But he was saying that while looking all shabby. His shield and armour were crumpled, blackened soot smeared his face and there were scratches from bullets grazing past. He wasn’t the only one. Leon, Melina, Kaya and Park were all in a similar condition. They were like soldiers who had been injured on the battlefield. No, it was right after exiting the battlefield. Just now they had fought a fierce battle against 30 black helmeted warriors. The result was Slayer’s landslide victory.....that wasn’t true but they still won. Slayer’s group had fought the enemy for 30 minutes but the black helmets retreated after half of them died. Meanwhile Slayer had moved to the place Ark designated and met up with the Royal Guards.

“What about Ark-nim?”

Melina who was looking at the crew asked. The members flinched and replied with tears in their eyes.

“Hyung-nim said he had something to do alone and left separately.”

“Left separately?”

“Yes.”

“What stupid thing.....”

“It is because of us! Hyung-nim said he had something to do but he actually left in order to give us time to get away. Hyung-nim.....Hyung-nim.....”

“Of course Ark-nim did that.”

Melina sighed and nodded.

“It’s just like when the Kero attacked Mt. Fargo. Ark neglected to take care of his own body while desperately trying to save others. Ark-nim is like that.”

“That’s right! Hyung-nim is such a person!”

The members furiously nodded their heads. Kaya’s group listened to the Royal Guards with their expressions asking ‘Was Ark such a character?’ but they left it alone. Sadain who had recovered his breath started to talk.

“So? Where is Ark now?”

“I don’t know. Hyung-nim entered a complicated passageway and we were being pursued so there was no time to contact him. And Hyung-nim said to contact him after joining up with you.”

“Then do it now.”

Sadain said to Slayer. Then Slayer operated his Nymph and called Ark.

“Ahh! Ahh! Ark, this is Slayer! Ark, over! Ark! You’re not answering?”

“He might be busy or.....”

Sadain murmured in an uneasy voice. Then a crackling noise appeared over Slayer’s Nymph.

–Did you join with the members?

“A-Ark!”

“Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim is alive!”

The members stirred up after hearing Ark’s voice.

–Focus your strengths on the ones pursuing the members. There are presently 25 members in the chasing team. The Commander is among the members I’m taking care of so you should be able to deal with them. But there is no guarantee they will be the only ones attacking. The main force of the enemy is

likely to be gathered at the 2 pronged path at the entrance. So rest after taking care of the guys chasing you and recover your maximum health. I.....am coming soon.

“U-unbelievable.....”

The swordsman muttered in a confused voice. The RPG had smashed the glass tube Ark had been in. However he hadn't intended the RPG to kill Ark. No, he didn't think it was enough to kill Ark. He knew that Ark was like a cockroach. If Ark was someone who couldn't deal with a RPG then he wouldn't be burning with vengeance like this. The RPG was just intended to shatter the glass tube.

The swordsman thought that Ark wouldn't allow the shell to hit the glass tube. And his posture was prepared for an attack. But unlike his expectation, Ark had just continued struggling inside the tube until it was directly hit. And it exploded!

“What, what the? Why did this bastard?”

In fact, the swordsman was the one who panicked the most. He had sweated for a long time in order to get revenge on Ark. This time he even violated a command from above in order to gamble on getting his revenge. Yet what was the point if Ark died from one RPG? But it was afterwards that made him more confused.

“Gone! He's gone!”

He was looking at the wreckage of the glass tube. Even if he wasn't alive, there should at least be a dead body. However there weren't any traces of Ark at all.

“No, it is impossible for him to disappear. He is obviously somewhere here.....”

The man approached the wreckage of the glass tube before stopping. The blast had caused the yellow liquid to flow onto the floor. There was also an unidentified red slime. And the moment he narrowed his eyes at the slime!

Wiing!

A blue flash suddenly rose in front of him. The man reflexively avoided it and retreated several steps. He clutched his sword when he heard a noise.

“Sheesh, it was a little short.”

It was Ark!

‘It was worth all that changing into a Myutal.’

That’s how Ark was able to avoid the RPG attack. Once again, Ark had obtained the side effect thanks to Mix-up. Mix-up decreased intelligence by 10 and increase stamina by 30. His 2 star Withdrawal skill also evolved one step higher to Hide. Ark had used Hide the moment the shell hit the glass tube. The Hide technique scattered a red slime on the ground like the Myutal he fought on Rakunka! Well, he was hit by the shell so he ended up damaged but the shell had hit the glass first. Fortunately Ark hid himself in the ground so he received almost no damage.

‘Sheesh, how tenacious. I hoped they would leave.....’

In fact, Ark had wanted to wait until they left. However the man had detected the red slime and was about to check it. It was only a matter of time until that guy stabbed it with his lightsaber. So he tried a surprise attack but it didn’t connect.

‘Damn, he dodged it. I thought it before but he definitely isn’t an ordinary guy. Furthermore, there are 3 more people. I don’t know the other two but that guy is the shooter! He also isn’t ordinary. The swordsman and gunner are

formidable. And the other two as well. It is impossible to take care of all of them at once.'

While Ark was busy thinking. The man spoke in a low voice.

"As expected, you're alive."

"I'm sorry I didn't die like you hoped."

"You're welcome. If you died this easy then I would be in trouble. No, don't die so easily. The humiliation I received from you! I will make you feel the same shame."

"I don't know what humiliation you received....."

Ark looked at the swordsman and laughed.

"You're only this smug because of the number of people behind you. If I was in your position then I wouldn't be able to clap about it. I guess the only thing you can do when someone is stronger than you is to throw more people at them. Well! It's a very excellent choice. That's right. That is the only way for a person like you to win. Although I don't know if I will feel humiliation."

"You're just trying to provoke me into a 1 on 1 fight."

Dammit, he was right. He couldn't win in a 4 against 1 fight. He also couldn't expect the help of Slayer or the Royal Guards. The current team members were fighting the enemy pursuing the Royal Guards. Even if they could easily deal with the enemy, it would take at least 30 minutes. So Ark thought about it.

He seemed to be quite a prideful guy. Ark was familiar with these types of guys. They were smug bastards that treated others badly. If their ego was just slightly scratched then their bad habit would appear. But the swordsman just laughed.

'It didn't work?'

“The plot was obvious but.....I’m not fooled.”

While Ark was inwardly sighing, the man stepped closer and said.

“This isn’t because of your provocation. This is a problem of my pride. I might’ve lost but I never thought I was weaker than you. No, I was weak. But this time is different. I will soon teach you that difference.”

‘This guy is indeed an idiot!’

He might be blabbering on about other reasons but the result was the same! He truly was a fool who left Ark with an escape route. Well, Ark wanted to thank him!

.....That’s what he thought.....

“You block the entrance and don’t let him run away!”

“Hah! Don’t make me laugh. Aren’t you just going to call them for help when the situation becomes disadvantageous to you?”

“You’ll see who needs help soon!”

Wiing! Wiiiing! Wiing!

The swordsman rushed forward with his lightsaber. Ark also held his posture while lifting his lightsaber. The blue lights started to cross and clash with each other, causing afterimages. Sparks flew with every collision. The two people crossed swords dozens of times in a few seconds before both sides retreated.

‘That bastard.....’

Ark quickly looked at the swordsman.

‘He hasn’t been using the sword for just a day or two. He has reached a significant level of sword mastery. Have I met such a user before?’

So far, the strongest person Ark had encountered in Galaxian was the Red

Slaughterer. But the Red Slaughterer gave the impression of having skills that utilized the game environment rather than actual fighting skills. That is, his movements felt optimized to the game? However, the man across from him was the opposite! He fought depending more on his sword skills than his character's skills. The problem was that he had extraordinary sword skills. If Ark was a protagonist of a martial arts movie, he would be the rival that received training from another master. Ark might sweat at the memory of his training but it meant he reached a significant level of martial arts skills.

But he didn't exercise after becoming the strongest user in New World. No, he had no need to. Ark had started training in martial arts to make playing the game easier. However Ark was literally a God in New World after obtaining the master code. Even if a bunch of legendary monsters appeared in front of him.....he had the ability to kill them just from pressing the 'Del' key. However he started to train again once starting Galaxian. It still took a while to regain his sense of movement but it was pretty good after his confrontation with the Red Slaughterer. Yet the swordsman was matching Ark in a 1 on 1 fight. But Ark wasn't that easy to deal with.

“.....Indeed.”

The man nodded. He had sensed the same thing as Ark. Their skills were almost equal! Then the situation was simple. If their equipment and sword skills were equal then the only thing left was the superiority of their skills. But there was no big difference when they engaged in close combat just now. So victory would be decided by who made a mistake first!

“It can't stay like this. Peytal Blade!”

The man attacked first. The lightsaber caused an air current like a storm that flew towards me.

“Sonic Sword!”

It was cut by Sonic Sword that had no form! The air current was split apart by his shockwave. The man then got close to Ark and attacked.

“Defense Break!”

However Ark used the orbit of his sword to break the opponent’s defense posture.

“Khafra Fencing 3rd style! Galaxy.....”

After the man’s chest was wide open, Ark was about to use a skill with his lightsaber. But the man twisted his body and hit Ark’s wrist with his sword hilt. Ark’s arm loosened and his lightsaber fell to the ground.

‘T-this!’

The man hadn’t used a skill. He just used the sword skills that his body had mastered. The man wearing the helmet raised his glittering sword.

“It’s up to here!”

The moment the sword was about to fall! Ark’s lightsaber on the ground rose like lightning. The sword was controlled by Psychokinesis! The swordsman was so busy concentrating on winning that he unexpectedly received a blow on the chest.

“No, it is my turn to attack now! Welcome to the alter ego!”

Ark’s rushing body split into 5. The swordsman had already seen Welcome to the alter ego. Welcome to the alter ego was designed to confuse the enemy and attack from behind! The swordsman automatically turned and struck a defense pose. As expected, the Arks had spread in all directions before combining into one behind him. However, there was no sword in the overlapping hands.

“S-sword.....?”

Snap!

Sparks flew from the swordsman’s neck. The light rotating like a spin top and carving thick marks onto the man’s neck was Ark’s lightsaber! He had combined Psychokinesis with Welcome to the alter ego.

“Ugh!”

The man grabbed his neck and stumbled. The lightsaber flew from his neck to Ark’s hand. And.....

Wiiiiing, wiiiiing.

There was an explosion of light! This was the result when a battle between users of a certain level and skill occurred. It was hard to counterattack once someone was on the defensive. It was the same for the swordsman. He couldn’t find any gaps as Ark started his continuous series of strikes. His health fell from 60% to 20%. Moreover, various abnormal stats occurred because of the continuous critical hits so he couldn’t escape. But there was a way.

“Damn! Armour armament!”

A metal capsule sprang out of the swordsman’s bag. It spun in the air and transformed into a battle suit of armour that covered the swordsman. This was the best way to escape an enemy’s series of attacks! A shock wave had occurred when the battle suit was equipped. Ark was pushed back several metres from the shock wave and his series of consecutive attacks was stopped. However.....

“I’ve been waiting for this! Armour armament!”

Ark exclaimed with a flash. The space warped and the summoned battle suit wrapped around his body.

“Binding Sword!”

Chwa chwa chwa chwa! Chwa chwa chwa chwa!

At that moment, the chest area of his battle suit split to the sides. It was like the skin of an insect or crustacean opening to reveal dozens of beads! The chest opened and the beads simultaneously fired laser beams. No, they were lights that looked like lasers! The threads of light wound around the swordsman and a message appeared.

-Binding Sword Lv. 2 has captured the enemy!

<The Drone inside the battle suit has created a chain to seal the enemy’s movements for 4 seconds.

In addition, the enemy can be pulled in front of the user. And the moment the duration ends, the chain will explode to deal additional damage>

A chain created by the battle suit! The sudden change in the skill was thanks to Ark’s complete synchronization with the battle suit. That’s right. Arc had already completed the gene rearrangement.

-The process to rearrange your genes to synchronize with the Drone has been completed!

You have succeeded in rearranged your genetic information and accomplished a perfect

synchronization with the Drone. This means you can use 100% of the battle suit's power.

You will now feel even the smallest bit of dirt falling on the battle suit, it won't be uncomfortable to breath anymore and you will be able to move without feeling the battle suit. In addition, the effect of the skills expressed through body coating will be amplified.

However this is a Rama battle suit so you won't be synchronized to the federation battle suit anymore.

<When wearing the battle suit, a special effect will be given to your body coating skills> + When the battle suit is equipped, the environmental adaption will rise by an additional 30% (80%).

+ When the battle suit is equipped, the rate that satiety falls will be reduced by a further 20% (50%).

+ When the battle suit is equipped, fall damage will be reduced by an additional 30% (80%).

+ The amount of mana used by 18 Barrage can be adjusted.

+ The battle suit's duration has increased by 30%.

The information window that floated in front of him! In Galaxian there were two types of skills. He wasn't talking about active and passive. It was acquired skills and innate skills. Acquired skills were those that took no effort and could be learnt by repetitive learning. Most skills belonged to that category. But in Galaxian, the DNA of other species could be absorbed to learn skills. The innate skills were those learnt through body coating! The effects of these skills were amplified once he achieved 100% synchronization with his battle suit. Once he wore the battle suits, all sorts of effects went UP! That wasn't all.

'I feel like I'm not even wearing armour.'

Ark's body suit increased his capabilities by 35%. Naturally he would become stronger. However his senses became dull like he was wearing thick clothes so that was a disadvantage. He thought it was natural since it was a thick armour. But it wasn't natural. After the synchronization was completed, the battle suit felt just like his skin. It felt like he was just wearing clothes instead of armour!

'This is the real battle suit!'

In the meantime he had been using an incomplete battle suit. He also consumed all the mana of the battle suit when using 18 Barrage. He hadn't been able to control the amount of mana used. However, the situation changed with the 100% synchronization.

"Come!"

Ark shouted as he looked at the swordsman. At that moment the chain around the swordsman's chest was pulled. He was like a fly caught by a spider!

"18 Barrage!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

18 Barrage was Hyper Drone's knockdown skill! Steam was blown out as his accelerated steel fists impacted with the swordsman's chest. Ark used 50% of his mana. His opponent's health was only 20% so that should be sufficient. A fist mark was carved into the swordsman's chest every time until it hit 18 times! The opponent flew back into the wall.

"You.....you.....!"

'You' was the only word he could say.

Then blood spewed out and it was GAME OVER! But Ark couldn't afford to breath yet. It had been a 1 on 1 duel. But the remaining people wouldn't step aside after his opponent died.

"H-Hyung-nim!"

"T-this bastard!"

The two soldiers lifted their machine gun and RPG. This was the reason Ark only used 50% of his mana! Ark had already anticipated his reaction so he triggered Hyper Booster. The moment the soldier tried to fire the RPG!

"It's up to here."

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

The gunner fired in rapid succession. But surprisingly, his muzzle was aimed towards the back of the soldier holding the RPG! He then pulled the trigger. It was an unimaginable situation to the two soldiers as they turned back to the gunner. The gunner aimed at the handle of the machine gun and RPG to deflect it before aiming at the vital spots like the head, heart and jaw.

"Kuak! T-this bastard....."

Tang! Tang! Tu tu tu tu! Pepeng!

The shots continued for a while. Eventually the two men were slumped in a

pile of their own blood. Out of the 3 soldiers, only one was remaining. It was just the gunner. Ark narrowed his eyes at the gunner covered in blood.

“You.....who are you?”

“Hey!”

Ark ran down the passage and shouted. The people gathered on the opposite side reacted to his voice and turned around. They were Slayer, Leon and the Royal Guards. While Ark had entered the Central Laboratory, the battle against the black helmets chasing after the Royal Guards was already finished. There were the bodies of 20 black helmets and Ark’s team members scattered on the ground.

“Ark, you’re alive!”

“Hah, but he.....”

The team members suddenly flinched and grabbed their weapons. Ark was followed by someone wearing black armour and a black helmet like the enemy scattered on the ground. The man holding the pistol was the gunner from the laboratory. Ark shook his head and said to the team.

“No, this one is okay.”

“Okay? Why?”

“That fellow.....isn’t he with them?”

“He decided to cooperate for the time being.”

The gunner added after Ark’s words.

“You understand?”

“I don’t understand pal!”

Slayer burst out angrily. He stared at Melina slumped against the wall and growled.

“Because of that guy.....Melina-nim because of that guy.....ugh! She’s never died once since we’ve been with her.....dammit! I’m going to get revenge for her!”

“Of course! Blood for blood!”

Leon also exclaimed as he loaded his rail gun. Melina wasn’t the only one. Kaya and Park had bullet marks on their bodies, both autobots had collapsed along with Berad and Cupa from the Royal Guards. They could revive at the Fairy but they had lost the experience they gained on Impeltus. And the death of their comrades ignited the team’s fighting spirit! The team members gathered in front of the teammates dead bodies with tears streaming from their eyes.

“You bastard, you want to try it? Okay. Then let’s end this. Kill all of.....”

“No, we have to escape from here.”

“That won’t be easy.”

The person who answered was Sadain.

“Like you said earlier, their main force is gathered at the entrance of the laboratory. They number approximately 70 people. And there are no obstacles around them. There are a lot of troops and it is impossible with just Slayer as protection. Park’s autobots would be helpful but that won’t work as you can see. Our recovery ampoules are used up so the odds aren’t in our favour in close combat.”

Ark’s eyes widened at Sadain’s words. Sadain frowned and asked.

“What is it?”

“No, that’s the first time I heard you talk for so long.”

“This isn’t the time to be playing around.”

“I wasn’t playing around. We have to quickly get out of here. This isn’t just talk. Those guys aren’t at the entrance. They are coming along the right passage to this place.”

Ark had a reason for being so confident.

“You.....who are you?”

He asked the gunner standing in the pile of blood. The gunner watched Ark with a wary expression and said.

“I’m not your enemy for today.”

The gunner replied as he put his pistol into his bag. Ark stared at him.

“For today?”

“I’ll have to see in the future if we are enemies or colleagues. I haven’t decided yet. But for now you’re not my enemy.”

“Then take off the black helmet and say that.”

“It isn’t hard to take off my helmet. But then I will need to explain many things. And now isn’t the time for that. Shouldn’t you know this too?”

“Will the situation change if I believe you?”

“Of course.”

He said while manipulating his Nymph.

“It is me. Move through the right side passage at the entrance to where I am now.”

–The entire main force? But Captain-nim commanded.....

“You fool! There’s no time! Right now Leader is fighting with Ark! And there is a secret passage hidden in the room where he can escape towards the 6 o’clock position in the laboratory! Now Ark has killed the leader and two soldiers and is escaping through the secret passage! Use the right passage to move to the room in the 6 o’clock direction! Hurry!”

-Huh? Oh, I see! Let’s go! Follow me!

A baffled exclamation was heard from the gunner’s Nymphe. The gunner broke the communication and said in a mischievous voice.

“Do I need to explain the situation to you? Ark. It is up to you whether to believe me or not. If you believe me then you will join up with your team and escape from the left passage. If you don’t believe me then use the right passage.”

Only a fool wouldn’t understand his purpose. But Ark decided to believe the gunner for the moment. The reason was simple. After he defeated the leader with 18 Barrage, the situation was still in the favour of the black helmets. If they sealed the entrance then Ark’s team wouldn’t be able to escape. In this situation, there was no reason for the gunner to lie or kill his two colleagues. And the gunner didn’t ask anything from Ark for his help. If he lied then naturally Ark’s team would kill him before they died. There was no reason for the gunner to commit suicide in such a way.

“Okay. I’ll believe you for now.”

‘It was true.’

He thought while running down the left passage. Ark arrived in front of the

entrance and nodded. There were no black helmet troops to be seen. They probably moved to the 6 o'clock position after receiving the gunner's communication. However the situation still wasn't over. If the black helmets couldn't find the secret passage then they would return!

"Hurry! We can't relax until we escape from Impeltus!"

"Okay! I'll go out first!"

"Wait a minute!"

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa! Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Just as Slayer was jumping outside. There was a roaring sound as the gunner yelled and dirt went flying up. Shells were pouring from the air! Slayer screamed before running back.

"Hik! Hik! Hik! I-I almost died! A ship! A spaceship is floating in front!"

"Is there something you can do?"

"Wait a moment."

The gunner nodded at Ark's question. And he manipulated his Nymphe for a while.

Pepeng! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Flames shot up from the rear of the ship floating outside the laboratory. It lost its centre of balance as black smoke rose from it.

The gunner looked at Ark and said.

"I've planted a bomb in the power section of the engine room. But it isn't a regular C-6 explosive. The power is disconnected and they can't move. It will take at least 20 minutes to recover. So it is better to move instead of wasting time being surprised."

“I know! Let’s go!”

Ark immediately led the team out. At the same time, a silver flash flew down from the purple clouds. He had called the Silver Star in advance using the remote control system by the time they arrived at the entrance. Once the Silver Star arrived in front of the laboratory.....

Tol tol tol tol! Tol tol tol tol!

The lower door opened and a rope was lowered.

“Damn! What is this while we’re trying not to die? Change it once you return to Turan!”

Slayer shouted irately as he looked at the rope.

.....Ark was also seriously considering it. Anyway, the team members didn’t have a problem getting on the Silver Star. First it was Ark and the Royal Guards, Slayer, Leon, Sadain and lastly the gunner. Milan who had sat in the cockpit of the Silver Star as soon as he entered shouted.

“Hyung-nim, everyone has boarded!”

“Okay. Close the bottom doors. All injured people should head to the infirmary! Hegel, calculate the energy required to enter the atmosphere and how long it will take to charge.”

“It will require 30 minutes!”

The time needed for the enemy’s ship to restore power was 20 minutes. Meanwhile Ark and his companions had taken 15 minutes to board the Silver Star. If they broke through the atmosphere immediately then they couldn’t escape pursuit. However the Silver Star needed to recharge the energy required to break into the atmosphere. Hegel calculated that the recharge time would be 30 minutes. That meant the enemy’s ship would recover faster!

‘If we’re forced to fight then we’ll be stuck while those guys can move!’

“Milan, turn in the direction of the enemy! Hegel, switch the Silver Star to combat mode. Set the turrets to semi-automatic, load the warheads and calculate the angle. Kalliben, Leon, take the left and right turrets respectively. Smash them before they recover!”

Woong woong woong woong! Woong woong woong woong!

The Silver Star rotated. At the same time, dozens of information windows opened in front of him. Shield related information, number of shells stored in the gun turrets, energy and balance graphs and various information about the targeted enemy ship. This was the view after the Silver Star had switched to battle mode. The front window zoomed in on the ship spewing black smoke. Several red aiming pointers overlapped on the ship and Hegel shouted.

“Enemy ship, targeting is complete!”

“Attack!”

Ark stood up and shouted.

“Hyung-nim, an energy reaction! A massive amount of energy is condensing in front of us! The amount of energy indicates that it is a 3rd grade battleship like the Silver Star! The energy is facing the enemy ship!”

Hegel shouted with surprise after manipulating the dashboard. At the same time, the clouds above the ship the Silver Star was targeting started to whirl and a white light shot downwards. The enemy’s ship didn’t work so the wings started to melt and caused a chain explosion.

“What the hell? All of a sudden.....”

Ark raised his head and exclaimed. A spaceship was slowly descending from the purple clouds. The spaceship had a bright red hull! One man was laughing

inside the spaceship.

“This is the 2nd competition Ark!”

The man inside the ship was the Red Slaughterer.

TO BE CONTINUED